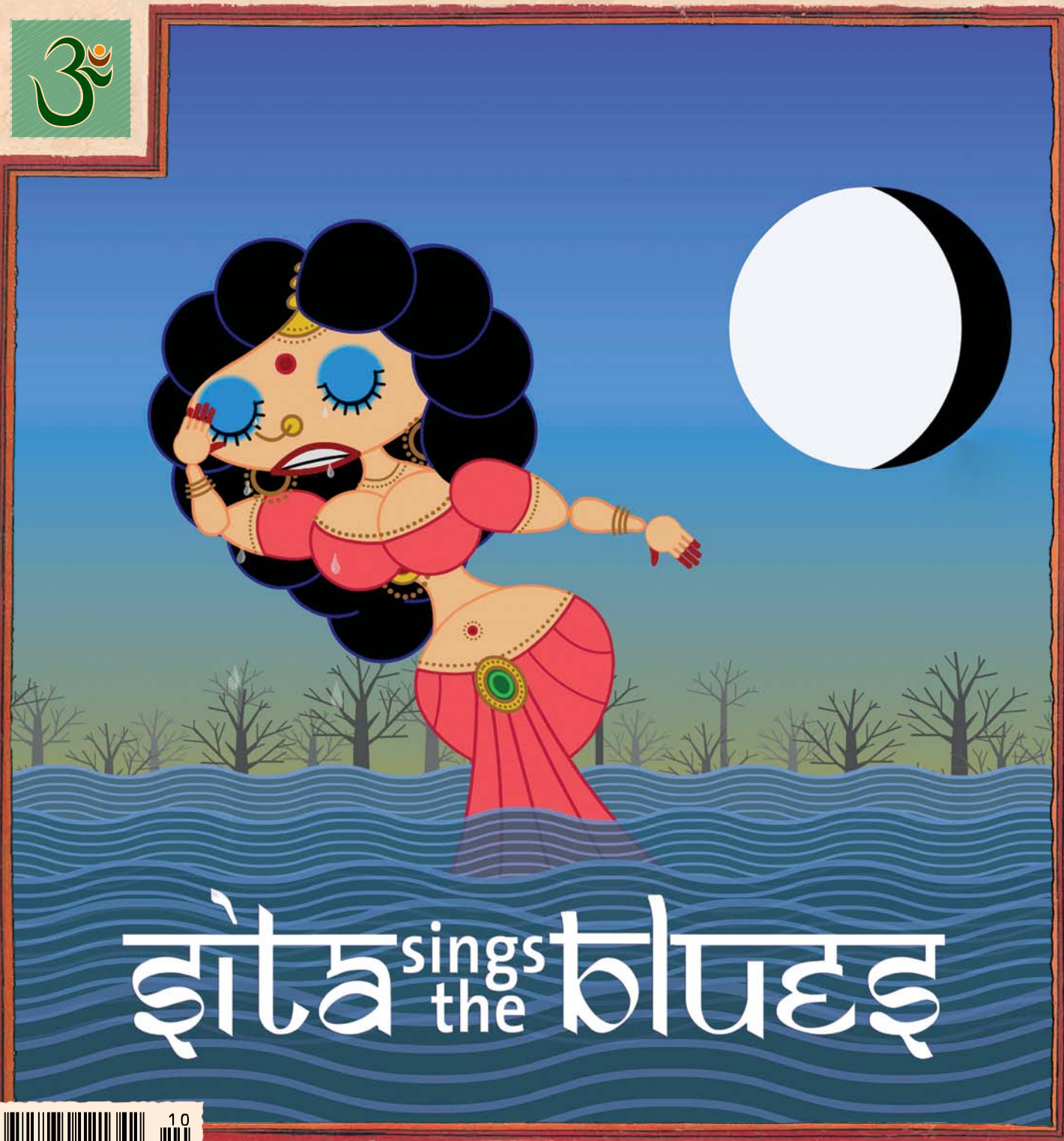


HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



श्रीतु सिंग्स
the ब्लूज्स

NINA PALEY



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

COVER: A heartbroken Sita cries a river of tears to mourn her husband Rama's absence—a scene from the animated movie "Sita Sings the Blues;" (above) sadhus at the 2010 Maha Kumbha Mela observe the ritual of *biksha*, begging flour from established monastic orders

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2010 • HINDU YEAR 5112
VIKITA, THE YEAR OF CHALLENGING CHANGE

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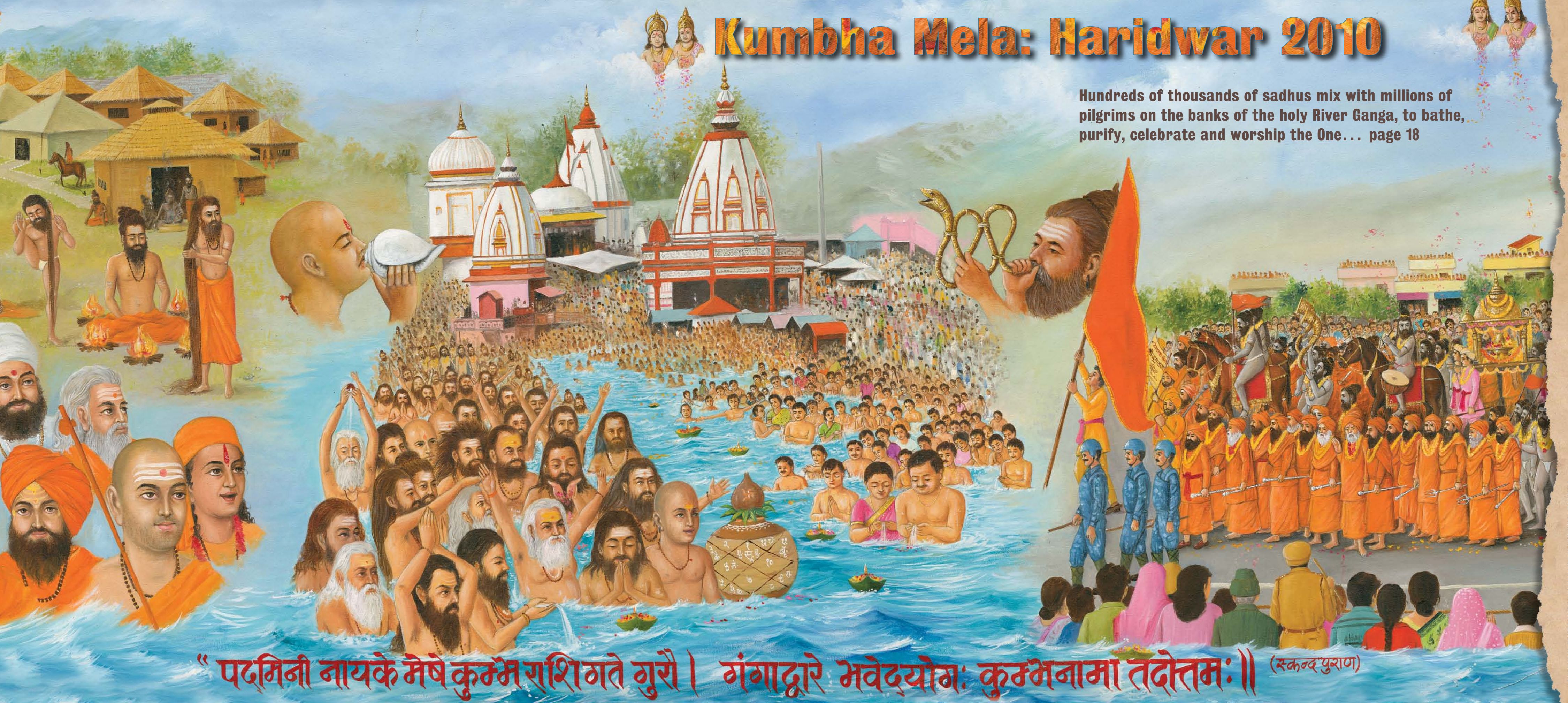
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Kumbha Mela: Haridwar 2010

Hundreds of thousands of sadhus mix with millions of pilgrims on the banks of the holy River Ganga, to bathe, purify, celebrate and worship the One... page 18



“पद्मिनी नायके मेषे कुम्भे राशि गते गुरौ । गंगाद्वारे भवेद्योगः कुम्भनामा तदोत्तमः ॥ (स्कन्दपुराण)

Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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As expected, the Gali Gopuram finally collapsed three days after a giant crack appeared in the tower. There were no known casualties.

INDIA

Kalahasti Tower Collapses

ON MAY 26, 2010, AT 8PM, THE 500-YEAR-OLD GALI GOPURAM of the famed Siva temple of Kalahasti, about 36 kilometers east of Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh, crumbled into a heap of rubble. A huge crack had been observed three days earlier, and authorities had evacuated the area anticipating the collapse. The seven-story, 135-foot-tall *gopuram*, built 500 years ago of clay and stone by Vijayanagar emperor Raja Sri Krishna Deva, had shown cracks and signs of decay for decades. One tourist even died from a falling rock. Civil groups had complained about the neglect. Despite the temple's huge revenues, authorities did nothing. Recent adjacent heavy machinery works and the intense rains of Cyclone Laila were cited as the final destructive factors. The main Siva sanctum was not affected. Plans have been mooted to rebuild the tower.

NETHERLANDS

VU University Diaspora Chair Dr. Choenni

IN 1873, THE SHIP LALLA ROOKH brought the first contingent of indentured laborers from British



Dr. Choenni, a specialist in migration, color and integration

India to Dutch-controlled Suriname in South America. By 1916, 34,000 Bhojpuri-speaking Hindus from North India had settled there. After decades of turbulence, the Dutch granted independence to Suriname in 1975. One third of the population emigrated to the Netherlands, fearing that the new country would not be able to survive. Today, there are 160,000 people of Indian descent in the Netherlands and 135,000 in Suriname, where they are the majority.

In September, 2010, Dr. Chandersen ("Chan") E.S. Choenni, born in Suriname, was appointed to the Lalla Rookh Diaspora Chair at Netherland's prestigious VU University. The collective experience of Surinamese Indians, being pertinent to the global dialog on migration and integration, will now be officially studied and documented. Dr. Chan brings considerable expertise to his position, with a Master's in political science, a PhD in social science and many years of service in Dutch ministries and social service, welfare organizations and NGOs.

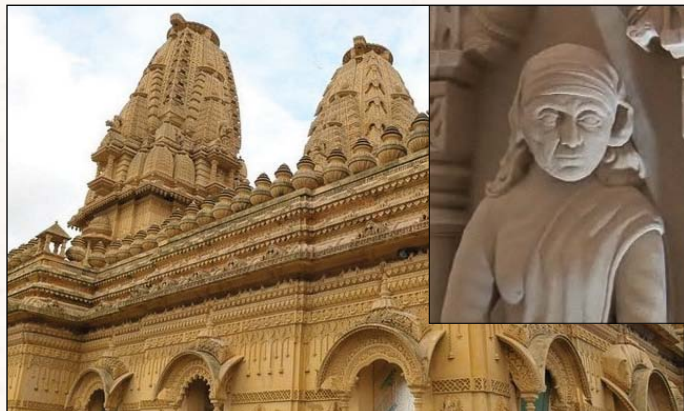
GLOBAL DHARMA

U K

New Temple's Unusual Icon

THE SHREE SANATAN HINDU Mandir, Wembley opened on May 31, 2010, after 14 years of work at a cost of over ^{US}\$24million. Built by the Vaishnava Vallabha Nidhi UK Branch, the exquisite lime-stone temple promotes itself as all-inclusive and includes 29 sanctums housing 41 gorgeous marble *murtis*. Carved according to the Hindu shastras (northwestern style), the

temple is being hailed as a masterpiece. However, among the hundreds of figures on its ornate pillars is a carving of Mother Teresa. According to their website, her image (and that of other non-Hindus, such as Guru Nanak) "showcases the temple's universality." The temple's chief priest, Raj Pandit Sharma, said, "We also queried the inclusion of the carving of Teresa." It was implemented by an earlier Board of Trustee and already installed when the present management took over. "For a number of considerations," he said, "its removal was not tenable."



Oops? Fantastic temple includes controversial Catholic missionary

NEW DELHI

Hanuman Helps Visas?

THE CHAMATAKARIK SHREE Hanuman Ji Ka Mandir in the narrow lanes of Neb Sarai is attracting hordes of devotees praying to have their visas approved for travel abroad. Rekha Jain, an astrologer at the temple, tells people to pray to Hanumanji and gives them a mantra. She says, "People think it is us who help get the visa, which is not true. It is just a temple where they can pray and ask for God's help." The phenomenon is now spreading to other Hanuman temples across India.



Hanuman led Lord Ram's team to Sri Lanka. How about to USA?



Side view of Nataraja in wax (above), showing exquisite artistry; Varadaraj (right) lies down next to Nataraja to show its scale

INDIA

Largest Metal Nataraja

THE FAMED TOWN OF SWAMIMALAI in Tamil Nadu has 200 families who have passed down the lost-wax tradition of cast metal sculpture for many centuries. Several years ago, when Varadaraj, now 32, discovered his own talents during his apprenticeship, he and his two younger brothers decided to form a company called Bronze Creative. Their main client has been another young start-up firm, Lotus Sculpture, run by Kyle Tortora,

who began his business in his parent's garage in Connecticut, and has recently expanded to California. Working together, the two companies now supply some of the finest metal Indian artifacts available in the world.

For years, Varadaraj talked with Kyle about his vision of making the largest-ever bronze statue of Lord Nataraja. The work started this year, and it is shaping up to be a magnificent piece. Scheduled to be cast in late 2010, it will be 22-23 feet tall and weigh nearly ten tons. The base will display the 25 traditional forms of Siva. The price is tentatively set at ^{US}\$1 million.

Kyle points out that Tamil



Nadu's lost-wax metal artisans are in trouble. Demand for their expensive, finely crafted work is down. Even Indians, formerly one-third of Swamimalai's business, are opting more and more for cheap, cookie-cutter

sand-cast pieces. Commissioned work like this has become a lifeline for the ancient craft. So, when you choose to shop, go for the best and help save this art form!

GUJARAT

Life Without Food or Water

PRAHLAD JANI SAYS HE HAS lived for seven decades without food or water, having been blessed by a Goddess with special powers at a young age. In April of 2010 he agreed to be sequestered in an Ahmedabad hospital room for observation. Thirty medics from India's Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) attested that for two weeks he did not eat, drink or use the toilet. His only contact with liquid

Prahlad Jani offers blessings from Sterling Hospitals where he was sealed in for fifteen days

was to gargle and bathe.

Doctors scanned Jani's organs, brain and blood vessels and tested his heart, lungs and memory capacity. Other results from DNA analysis, molecular biology studies and tests on his hormones, enzymes, energy metabolism and genes will take months to come through. The DRDO hopes this data may help soldiers, astronauts or trapped people survive without nourishment.

"We still do not know how he survives," neurologist Sudhir Shah told reporters after the end of the experiment. "It is a mystery. But we cannot shut our eyes to the possibilities, to a source of energy other than calories." Prahlad is now back in his village near Ambji, Gujarat, continuing his yoga and meditation.



Smart Creation's spectacular gold-gilded, copper-sheet cladding of the Sri Badrakaliamman Temple's vimanam in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu

TEMPLE SCIENCES

High-Tech Gold Gilding

SMART CREATIONS IN TAMIL Nadu now offers two gilding services: Pon Alayam (Golden Temples) and Pon Il-lam (Golden Homes), using a fascinating new system from the UK called Nano Composite Gold Deposit technology.

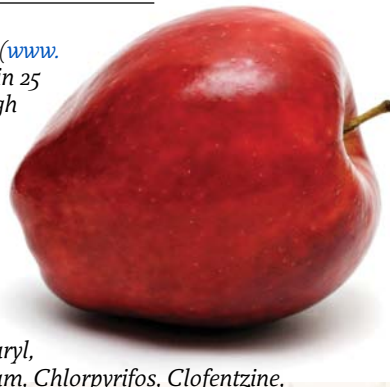
Copper sheet pieces, formed to stone carvings in the traditional way, are processed in their Karaikudi factory. The copper surface is cleaned with ultrasound and demineralized water. Next, a layer of nickel alloy is applied. This is followed by cobalt-hardened gold which is 99.7% pure and is three times harder than pure gold. Then a 25-micron-thick layer of Nano Composite Electro Phoretic laquer is applied by electrolysis

and heated in a special oven at 160 degrees centigrade.

Smart Creations' brochure says: "The lacquering done by us fuses with the base metal, providing an extraordinarily durable finish. This advanced process from the UK provides the ease of organic coatings while incorporating the superior surface properties of ceramics."

Smart Creations (www.SmartCreations.in) claims that only five grams of gold are required to gild one square foot of copper, with no wastage. They say the process is eco-friendly and uses no toxic chemicals. Gold usage can be minutely measured and certified, eliminating the disputes that often arise in the traditional process. The final product is touted as maintenance free, chemical resistant and corrosion resistant (tested against 250 hours of salt spray), with a guaranteed specific "life of gold sheen" period.

The Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org/node/19436) reports that 2 in 25 apples contain pesticide levels so high that a two-year-old eating more than half an apple could exceed the government's daily safe exposure levels. Lists of pesticides on apples and other produce are available from the USDA Pesticide Data Program. Apples contain: 1-Naphthol, Acetamiprid, Azinphosmethyl, Boscalid, Buprofezin, Captan, Carbaryl, Carbenda-zim (MBC), Chlorpropham, Chlorpyrifos, Clofentzine, Cyhalothrin, Cyhalothrin-L+R157836 epimer, Cyprodinil, Diazinon, Diflubenzuron, Dimethoate, Diphenylamine (DPA), Endosulfan I, Endosulfan II, Endosulfan sulfate, Esfenvalerate+Fenvalerate, Etoxazole, Fenpropathrin, Fenpyroximate, Imidacloprid, Methomyl, Myclobutanil, o-Phenylphenol, Omethoate, Oxamyl, Permethrin cis, Permethrin trans, Phosalone, Phosmet, and more—42 total found in some apples.



Today conditions seem calm and even Muslim villagers are welcoming them back.

THE ALL CEYLON BUDDHIST Congress plans to commence classes in Tamil for Buddhist monks, to create greater harmony between the two communities.

TWO BLACK GRANITE STATUES worth US\$50,000 were stolen in June of 2010 from the Hindu temple in Capshaw, Alabama.

POLAND IS POISED TO HAVE ITS first Hindu temple built by Indians and native citizens. The new "Hindu Bhavan" will house nine marble deities from Jaipur.

PHOTOS: SMART CREATIONS; SHUTTERSTOCK



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred Vedas and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this seva by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Animals in Entertainment

Hindus who practice nonviolence must take an honest look at how animals are treated in captivity

BY RAVI GROVER

AHIMSA IS A HINDU ideal that calls for vegetarianism and being kind to all living beings. Unfortunately, an area glossed over in the ahimsa discourse is that of animals held in captivity by the entertainment industry. In businesses such as zoos, circuses, rodeos and sea parks, inhumane treatment of animals needs to be addressed by those practicing ahimsa.

Earlier this year, a Sea World orca killed its trainer, adding another fatality to its record of three attacks on people. A year previous, a pet chimpanzee featured in commercials made headlines when it mauled a woman while attempting to escape. Zoos regularly see bears and tigers escape their enclosures and attack patrons. There are news stories of elephants escaping the circus and wreaking havoc. Incidents like these rarely happen when wild animals are in their natural habitats, allowed to roam freely and socialize with their species. But when isolated, held captive and forced into abnormal situations, these same animals suffer from severe depression and stress and act out aggressively.

Most of the public is unaware of the industry's use of himsa to manipulate the dharma of wild animals for the sake of entertainment and profit. For example, Bhagavan created a cheetah to run 40 miles per hour and thrive in tropical jungles and wide open spaces. Zoos disregard the laws of nature by confining it to a small cage in a different climate. Is it no surprise that wild cats exhibit depression by pacing back and forth in jail-cell-like structures? The orca whale is designed to swim up to 100 miles per day and is capable of communicating via sonar through a vast ocean. Sea parks place them in small tanks where their sonar bounces off the walls, causing some to become violent. Circus trainers use electric prods, bull hooks, chains and sticks to beat and choke animals into submission. Is it no



wonder that elephants, who live peacefully alongside people in Asia and Africa, when forced to perform in circuses, show signs of mental illness and become violent? Animals perform tricks out of fear of their captors.

In the book *Gorillas in the Mist*, zoologist Dian Fossey describes a European zoo's quest to draw more visitors by catching two baby gorillas

from an African rainforest. During the abduction, twenty adults rushed to rescue their babies—only to be shot and killed. Stories of animals defending their clan to the death from captors are commonplace all over the world. Those who believe that wild animals are removed peacefully from their natural habitats are sadly mistaken. No species voluntarily abandons its clan and trades in its natural tendencies and social behavior for involuntary isolation and performance of tricks in front of human audiences. Many wild animals don't even survive the long transportation into captivity. The lifespan of a captive animal is much lower than those living in the wild.

Belief in nonviolence and protection of the environment should encourage one to stop supporting businesses that keep animals confined. Those who desire to observe and learn about nature should instead support the numerous alternatives consistent with ahimsa. Rather than going where animals are confined, families can visit a national park, take a boat ride and whale watch, go on a safari or scuba dive. Documentaries about nature can be viewed in theaters and on TV. Rather than giving money to zoos, circuses and sea parks, consider instead donating that money to eco-tourist businesses, environmental groups, animal sanctuaries or charitable organizations that work to protect God's creation.

RAVI GROVER, 32, works for DePaul University in Chicago, volunteers for Save A Mother and co-writes for www.dharmadeen.com.

HEALTH

Toxic Food Alert!

MANY HAVE RESIGNED THEMSELVES to the widespread use of chemicals to grow food. "Without chemicals, the bugs will eat all the food, farmers will go out of business and we will all starve!" is the message from the agro-chemical industry.

Of course, this is not true. Chemicals breed chemical-resistant pests—"requiring" ever heavier doses of ever more toxic chemicals. Peaches now contain residues from over 60 pesticides, eight of which are known carcinogens. What may be a

tolerable adult dose is a huge dose to a small child and a severe threat to a pregnant woman's embryo or fetus.

Buy local organic, grow your own, or at least find alternatives for the top toxic vehicles: strawberries, bell peppers, spinach, cherries, peaches, mexican cantaloupe, celery, apples, apricots and green beans. Instead of celery in your salad, use the relatively cleaner cabbage. For vitamin C, eat grapefruit instead of cherries. Google "pesticides in food" and get informed!

BRIEFLY...

THE HIMALAYAN STATE OF Uttarakhand has granted official second-language status to Sanskrit and made grants to create 113 posts in 11 non-governmental Sanskrit colleges: 11 principals, 39 lecturers, 30 assistant teach-

ers, 11 clerks and 22 workers.

IN JULY, 2010, KASHMIR SAW the return of 100,000 Hindus of the Pandit community, who had fled their homeland in 1989 during a Muslim insurgency against Indian rule.

We Are Whom We Meet

The company we keep affects our attitudes, speech and actions as profoundly as the foods we eat

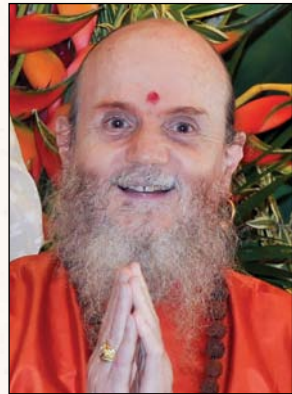
BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR WITH THE PHRASE "WE are what we eat." The Hindu viewpoint on this is that the different types of food we consume have a significant influence on our state of mind and emotions. For example, eating meat, which is known to be a tamasic food, opens the door to lower consciousness and makes it harder to stay out of the states of fear, anger, jealousy and the remorseful emotions that follow. Consuming too many spicy foods and stimulants, or rajasic foods, can overexcite our physical and intellectual activity. On the other hand, pure, or sattvic, foods—such as fresh fruits and vegetables that grow above the ground—foster our intuitive or soul nature. For maximum spiritual progress, it is best to eat plenty of sattvic foods, to be moderate in the intake of rajasic foods and to avoid tamasic foods. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.26.2) teaches: "When the food is pure, mind becomes pure. When the mind becomes pure, memory becomes firm. And when a man is in possession of a firm memory, all the bonds which tie him down to the world are loosened."

Today I want to expand the idea that "We are what we eat" by pointing out that our companions are an equally important influence on our state of mind and emotions—hence the title "We are whom we meet." The ethical scripture *Tirukural*, in Chapter 46, "Avoidance of Base Company," has ten insightful verses describing how powerfully we are influenced by the company we keep. Here are two of the verses. "As water changes according to the soil through which it flows, so a man assimilates the character of his associates." "Even perfect men, possessing the mind's full goodness, are fortified by pious fellowship."

Our actions, speech, state of consciousness and attitudes toward life are all strongly influenced by our companions, just as they are by the food we eat. Therefore, it is important to surround oneself with good, religious, higher-consciousness people. Every few months, I receive an e-mail from someone saying that he or she used to perform *sadhana* (regular religious practices), but stopped some time ago and now wants to get started again. The advice I give always includes attending a weekly satsang with others who are also performing *sadhana*. It can be difficult to sustain *sadhana* if you are striving alone. We need the companionship of others on the path to keep our *sadhana* strong, especially during difficult times in life. As my Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, often said: "The group helps the individual and the individual helps the group."

Of course, we must choose wisely, as companions can also influence us negatively. Here is a story to illustrate. A teenage boy starting his first year at high school made new friends who had a habit of swearing. The boy never swore previously but because he spent significant time with his new friends, he soon adopted their crude



language.

One of the times in life when religious companions are extremely important is during the university years, especially for students living away from home. The most obvious negative influence comes from fellow students who are more interested in partying than studying. A less visible, but equally erosive, influence comes from anti-religious instructors who propound atheism or existentialism and may even overtly demean Hinduism. Such encounters can instill negative habits and bring about loss of faith.

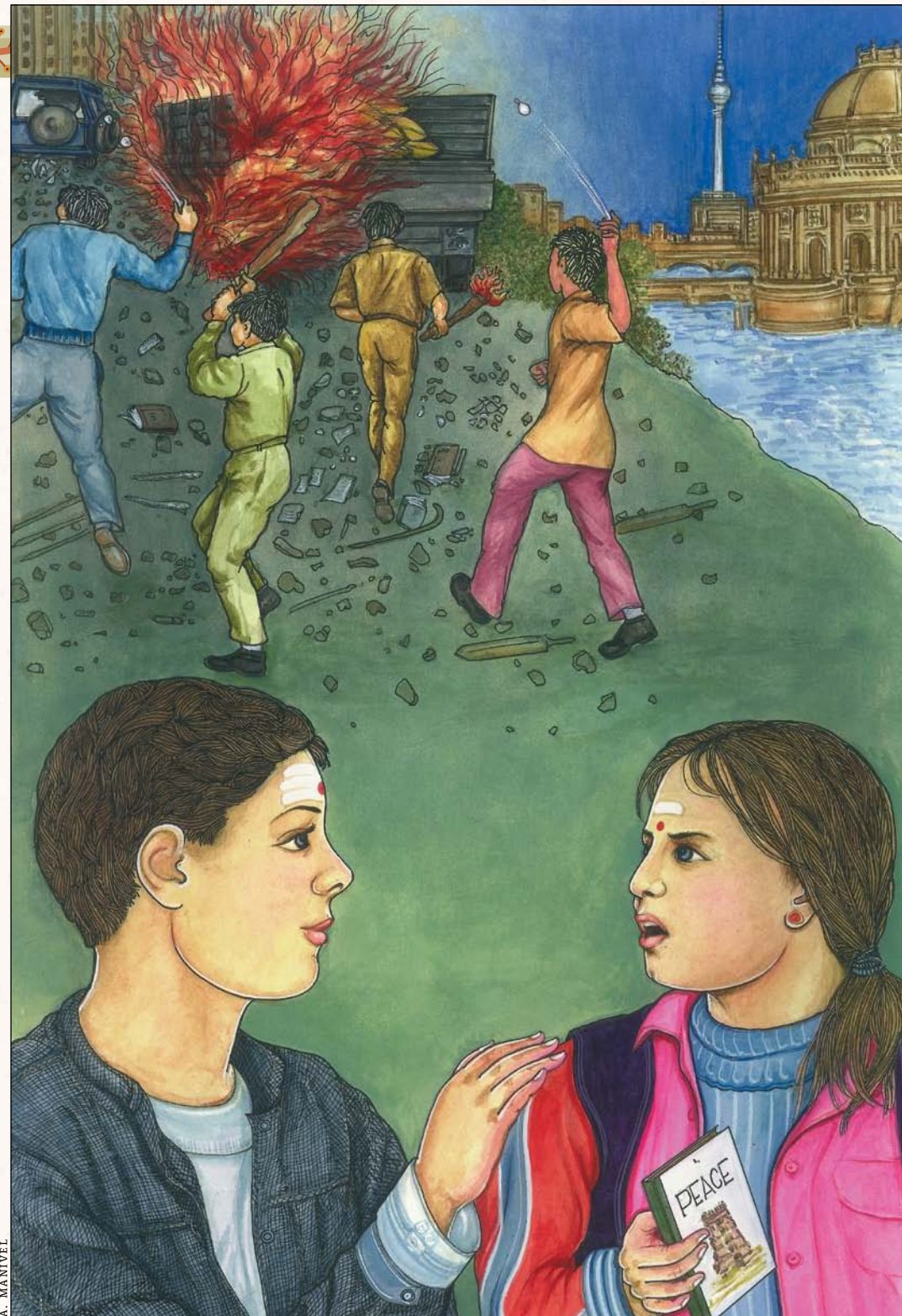
How to find suitable religious companionship? Universities are not necessarily close to satsang groups that could be attended regularly. For students whose university is close to a temple, we suggest visiting it weekly. If the temple is too far for a weekly visit, at least make an effort to attend during major festivals. Joining a Hindu students' group offers prime opportunities for interacting with peers who are spiritually inclined. If there is none at your school, but there are a good number of Hindu students at the university, consider founding a branch of an established Hindu students group on your campus. Other possibilities are to participate in an Indian cultural group, a yoga class or a meditation program.

Reinforcing Your Aura: Despite our best intentions to maintain pure companions, sometimes it can be necessary to interact at length with people who are strongly materialistic or even hedonistic. The challenge is to do so without letting their emotions penetrate and influence our own. If this does happen, you will experience their moods and emotions and may interpret them as your own.

If you could see the subtle energies of such an exchange, you would know that you have absorbed into your aura the dark reds, muddy browns and greens from another person's aura. You simply did not have enough prana in your aura to ward off the intrusion. Such thought forms and undesirable colors from others' auras are often called psychic influences.

The aura is a luminous, colorful field of subtle (or astral) energy radiating within and around the human body. The colors of the aura change constantly according to the ebb and flow of your state of consciousness, thoughts, moods and emotions. Fortunately, there are yogic exercises you can employ to vitalize your aura. Here is one such exercise from my guru:

"Sit quietly, breathe deeply and mentally get in touch with your



pranic body, first by visualizing it and secondly by feeling it. The *pranic* body of most people extends out from the physical body about one or two inches, depending on the level of vitality. Of course, the *pranic* body also completely permeates the entire physical body. As you sit quietly, breathing deeply and slowly, become intimately aware of the vitality, the prana, running throughout the physical body. As you breathe in, feel the vitality of your body. Feel the magnetic energy within it. Feel its life. Then, as you breathe out, mentally and through feeling release some of this vitality, this prana, this life force, and send it out into your aura. Keep sending it out on the out-

Reaching out: Two teenage friends are growing up in Germany, with the Berlin skyline behind them. While lawless youth run wild and vandalize property, they are grateful to have one another as companions who help keep them on dharma's path.

breath to the aura's outer edges all around your body, from your head to your feet. The outer edge of the human aura is about three or four feet away from the physical body. After you have charged your aura with vital prana in this way about nine times (nine breaths), you should begin to feel a magnetic shell being built around the outer edge of your aura. You will feel very secure and content as you sit within your own aura, which is charged with prana from your own pranic body. You are protected from all kinds of psychic influences, seen and unseen."

Despite our best efforts to keep our aura strong and not take on the worldly emotions of others, some of their thoughts and emotions can end up in our aura and influence us by lowering our consciousness and depressing our mood. What can be done? These darker colors can be changed to lighter colors—and hence a more positive mood—by the blessings we receive from the Deity and devas when we go to the temple or home shrine. They can also be changed by the practice of meditation. The practice of regularly purifying our aura by temple attendance and meditation keeps our consciousness higher and our state of mind happier.

A very important time to purify the aura is when we return home from being out in the world. The practice I prescribe is to first bathe and then enter the shrine room for the blessings of the Deity and devas which, when received, will dispel worldly forces and help us regain a state of God consciousness.

Attending temple pujas can be an even more powerful way of purifying the aura. An aspect of puja in the temple that is not widely understood is how it relates to the flow of prana. Except for the concluding *arati*, puja is a process of giving prana to the Deity. This is done through offering cut fruit, cooked food, water, fragrant flowers and milk. Then, during the final *arati*, the Deity and his helpers, or devas, reflect back this prana into the aura of each devotee, purifying it of subconscious congestions. The devotee so blessed leaves the temple feeling uplifted and relieved of mental conditions he had been burdened by.

Here is a final word of advice from my Gurudeva on the importance of spiritual companionship: "To sustain *shaucha*, purity, it is important to surround oneself with good, *devonic* company, to have the discrimination to know one type of person from another.

Too many foolish, sensitive souls, thinking their spirituality could lift a soul from the world of darkness, have walked in where even the Mahadevas do not tread and the devas fear to tread, only to find themselves caught in that very world through the deceit and conniving of the cleverly cunning. Let's not be foolish. Let's discriminate between higher consciousness and lower consciousness. Higher-consciousness people should surround themselves with higher-consciousness people to fulfill *shaucha*." The *Tirukural* observes: "Purity of mind and purity of conduct, these two depend upon the purity of a man's companions."

LETTERS

Kudos!

We are very fortunate to have from you a free supply of the precious magazine HINDUISM TODAY. All of us read the magazine with great fervor. It is the voice of Sanatana Dharma and the cultural bridge between East and West and South and North, making the world a truly global village. HINDUISM TODAY has come into the lives of millions of people across countries and continents, informing and entertaining, educating and enlightening, lifting readers' spirits, changing and transforming nations. You present open, clear, honest answers to questions in and on life, making the magazine endearing to all. HINDUISM TODAY is heralding the renaissance of this millennium for universal peace, progress and prosperity.

BHATTU GANESH SHARMA
VICE PRESIDENT, MARUTHI VIDYALAYA
BANGALORE, KARNATAKA, INDIA

Keep up the good work. I thoroughly enjoy reading HINDUISM TODAY every three months. The information given in this magazine is thoroughly researched and succinctly written so that anyone can read, easily understand and learn about Hinduism.

VYJU SUBRAMANIAN
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I enjoy reading your wonderful magazine which has provided much needed insight into the supreme faith which is Hinduism. I would like to suggest an article on the current excavations of the cities of ancient India to provide insight into the legacy left by the ancient people of our spiritual homeland.

DINESH NAIR
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Thank you, thank you, thank you! I always marvel at the meticulous care in the presentations of HINDUISM TODAY. It is as if the small group of monastics produce the content value of two to three bestselling books each issue, each with an obviously wonderful impact. I also sense the receptivity and interest of the reader is unfolding beautifully, making it possible for the words of HINDUISM TODAY to benefit one and all.

KUMAR NATARAJAN
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I am happy to let you know that your site has been included in an article I just posted on my blog entitled "50 Inspiring Religious Leaders You Should Follow on Twitter" ([online-christiancolleges.net/50-inspiring-religious-](http://online-christiancolleges.net/50-inspiring-religious-leaders-you-should-follow-on-twitter/)

[leaders-you-should-follow-on-twitter/](http://online-christiancolleges.net/50-inspiring-religious-leaders-you-should-follow-on-twitter/)).

KAREN L. ANDERSON
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and others have made logical and professional arguments to show that the origin of yoga is in Vedic Hindu culture.

RAM SIDHAYE
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Sacred Time and Space

I have returned recently to England from Haridwar, India, having attended the amazing Kumbha Mela festivities. The Kumbha Mela convinced me of the validity of the concept of sacred time and space. Before immersing myself in the Ganga, I made reverential prostrations to Ganga Devi and Surya Dev. The moment I emerged after taking my dip, I felt recharged and spiritually uplifted. I felt as though the Ganga was the living Goddess who had just blessed me. Hinduism is very much alive and well, notwithstanding the relentless march of materialism and the assaults from other religions.

SUBRATA DEY
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Yummy Festival Recipes

Your Apr/May/June 2010 issue was delightful to read, featuring appetizing and attractive vegetarian recipes. After reading them, I felt that I had to try them out, which I did with great success. Apart from providing food for the soul, you have ventured on providing food for the body! Great idea and a refreshing change. New, innovative ideas like this are always welcome. Please continue the great work you are doing. Congratulations.

SAROJINI THEIVENTHIRAN
ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO, CANADA

Catholic Ashrams

I'd like to point out a major factual inaccuracy in your article "Catholic Ashrams" (Dec 1986). You write that the Catholic Church teaches that the Church is the only way to salvation. In fact, the official position of the Catholic Church since Vatican II is that members of any religious tradition (including Hinduism) can attain salvation. You can find this in the Vatican II document "Lumen Gentium" (<http://bit.ly/lumgen>): "Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is

found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel." This is a very significant oversight. I think most documents from the Vatican are written to be read by Jesuits and canon lawyers. I know that interpretations of that particular passage differ widely. I think the most mainstream interpretation is that for anyone to be responsible for not accepting Christianity, it has to have been socially, psychologically, intellectually plausible for them to have accepted it—not a question of whether they have merely heard someone preach Christianity at some point in their lives, but whether there was any real chance that someone of their background might accept it. Most overt missionaries will think that's too liberal an interpretation, but most priests involved in inter-religious dialogue go to the opposite extreme and interpret that passage even more generously than the mainstream. This is significant in the context of your article, because most of the Catholic ashram movement is of the liberal, pro-inter-religious-dialogue persuasion.

PJ JOHNSTON
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✓ Thank you for bringing this to our attention. The document you reference is the very same promulgation we quoted in the 1986 article. Clearly there are multiple interpretations, even within the Catholic Church, of the document's conclusions about the salvific

efficacy of other faiths. Re-reading it, we remain convinced that the spirit of the overall document is one of exclusivity. "Dominus Iesus" (<http://bit.ly/domiesus>), written in 2000 by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, and ratified by Pope John Paul II, clarifies, "If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.... Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.... Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission ad gentes."

The Dowry Tree

In response to "Trees Planted to Honor the Birth of a Daughter Change Lives" (Hindu Press International, July 14, 2010), it would be better if we as Hindus actually push for the elimination of dowry so that, instead of fathers and families using the proceeds from the trees for dowry, they can use them for the betterment of their families and reduction of poverty. We Hindus like to sound high-minded, but we have a lot of housecleaning to do in our own religion.

CHIRAG BHATT
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Cross at War Memorial

Refer to the US Supreme Court's ruling blocking the removal of a Christian cross at a war memorial in the Mojave Desert ("Justices' Ruling Blocks Cross Removal," Hindu Press International, May 3, 2010). My view is that if the war memorial is for all soldiers following the Christian faith, then the decision to keep the cross may be appropriate, but if the military wishes to honor soldiers who were followers of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and other faiths, then it may not be fair. It may amount to discrimination! I recently attended a university medical department's annual service in memory of all who had donated their bodies, who belonged to several faiths, during which a cross was placed.

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Corrections

✓ We unintentionally left out the prominent website www.parihara.com in "Web Streaming God's Grace from India to the World" (Apr/May/June 2010).

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or submitted at: www.hinduismtoday.com

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

Publishing and the World's Vicissitudes

How you can help protect HINDUISM TODAY

THE WASHINGTON POST CO. JOLTED THE publishing world when it revealed plans to sell Newsweek magazine last May. Ad revenue had dropped and, with no means to cover losses, current owners had to abandon ship. A national institution that for 77 years was a smashing success, that projected smartness and solidity, suddenly showed deep and irreparable cracks. It sold August 1, 2010, for \$1.00.

Whereas commercial publications generally depend entirely on sales and advertising, a non-profit such as HINDUISM TODAY does have another option. It can build strong endowments to provide support and stability through turbulent times. Think of the well-endowed *National Geographic* magazine, which has been sailing smoothly since 1888.

A well-run endowment pays grants based on longer-term returns such as five years or more so that a drop in any one year or two or three does not impact revenues drastically. It



Newsweek magazine began publishing in 1933: Good run, for a commercial venture.

provides a bridge over the storm. It was with this in mind that founder Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wisely established the Hinduism Today Production Fund some 15 years ago. The fund has since grown steadily. Today it provides monies to enhance the magazine's content and reach—in the digital realm, notably. But it is still a young fund and needs to grow much stronger to keep HINDUISM TODAY seaworthy no matter what winds may come.

In 2009, we launched a project to increase the fund's principal by \$100,000. When the goal is realized, grants to the editors will be augmented by \$1,000 per quarter—a modest amount, but a good beginning, adequate to raise HINDUISM TODAY to a new level of quality and effectiveness, and a step closer to financial independence.

Please consider helping us meet this goal soon. You will be helping create a secure and abundant future for HINDUISM TODAY, wherein it dispenses our faith's life-giving information ever more generously. There can be no greater cause.

Ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at: www.gurudeva.org/email-news, visit www.hheonline.org/productionfund, or contact us at 1-808-634-5407 or hhe@hindu.org.

QUOTES & QUIPS

Hinduism is the ancient refuge for the wisdom of Self.

Swami Mayaitananda, founder of the Wise Earth Monastery

By constantly repeating, "I am free, I am free," a man verily becomes free. On the other hand, by constantly repeating, "I am bound, I am bound," he certainly becomes bound. The fool who says only, "I am a sinner, I am a sinner," verily drowns himself in worldliness. One should rather say: "I praise the name of God. How can I be a sinner? How can I be bound?" **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

Choose the path and teachings of a Guru who meets your liking and interest. Don't say bad things about other Gurus. Each Guru is special. Guru is God. God is Guru. The God to whom we pray comes in the form of a Guru. If we badmouth Gurus, we are bad-mouthing God. **Sri Narayani Amma**, head of the Narayani Peedham of Thirumalaikodi, Tamil Nadu, India

Is there a deeper tragedy than that of a man immersed in the pursuit of the not-self who has no time to realize the Divine Self within? **Sadhu Vaswani**, (1879–1966) founder the Sadhu Vaswani Mission

No idea has ever been defeated by force. To defeat an idea, you have to offer a better idea, a more attractive and acceptable one. **Amos Oz**, Israeli writer

When you give of yourself, you always receive more than you give.

Take up one idea and make that your life—think of it, dream of it, live on it. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success. One single soul with good motives, sincerity and infinite love can destroy the

dark designs of millions of hypocrites and brutes. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902), disciple of Sri Ramakrishna

Begin the day with love, spend the day with love, fill the day with love, end the day with love. **Swami Bua Ji Maharaj** (ca 1890–2010), Hindu of the Year 1998, spiritual teacher and extraordinary hatha yogi. Though he never disclosed his exact birth date, devotees say he reached 120 years, the ideal human lifespan mentioned in Hindu scripture.

It is Divinity that shapes, not only your ends, but also your acts, your words and thoughts. Your duty is to treat everybody, including yourself, as a manifestation of the Lord. **Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963), founder of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

DID YOU KNOW?

Lord Vishnu's Oldest Temple

THE GRAND CANYON IS ONE OF THE natural marvels of the world. Carved by the unrelenting flow of the Colorado River in the American state of Arizona, it extends for 446 km and reaches depths of 1,800 meters. It is an unsigned masterpiece. Some rock formations are so impressive that geologists name them after temples, castles or shrines, evoking a connection with the divine.

Names of Grand Canyon structures include: Brahma Temple, Wotan's Throne, Cheops Pyramid, Buddha Temple, Solomon Temple, Isis Temple, Jupiter Temple and Tower of Ra. Most were named in 1882 by Charles Dutton, a geologist who believed that the canyon belonged to all human-kind and its nomenclature should reflect all the world's cultures.

Geological rock layers are designated after surrounding landmarks representative of the layer. The whole Grand Canyon rests on a bed of sedimentary rock called the Vishnu Schist,

1,800,000,000 years old. The Vishnu Temple (right) forms its crown. Above this schist are the Brahma and Rama Schists, harder layers shaped by volcanic activity on the surface of a young Earth.



SHUTTERSTOCK

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place. **George Bernard Shaw** (1856–1950) Irish playwright

The reason I sanitized [Hinduism] is there's a lot of junk in it. **Deepak Chopra**, writer, as quoted by Newsweek

Give thanks for unknown blessings already on their way.

I am confident that there truly is such a thing as living again, and that the living spring from the dead. **Socrates**, (470–399 BCE) Greek philosopher

In between births we rest and learn and plan our next life. We all came here to do something. So do it and don't fool around!

Because I am finally beginning to notice some improvement. **Master cello player Pablo Casals** (1876–1973), when asked why he continued to practice at age 93

If numbers on the calendar were that significant, somewhere in the mid-morning of March 14, 2015, we would all become cosmically aware of π (3.14.15, 9:26:54 am).

You attain the feeling of love and then you want to discipline yourself. You love the discipline, because it brings more love. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

Don Piraro

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BASICS OF HINDUISM

Restraints and Observances

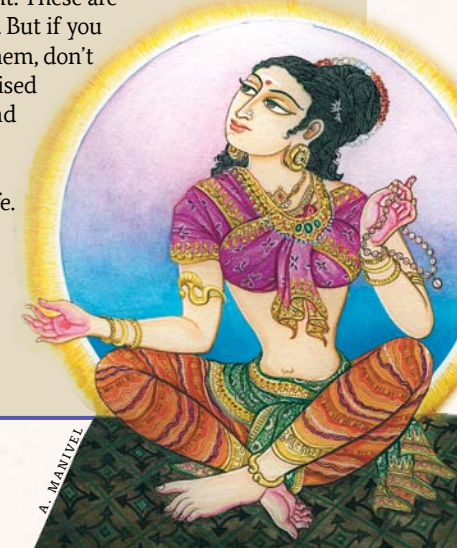
THERE HAVE BEEN MANY SYSTEMS AND principles of ethics and morality, established by various world teachers down through the ages. Their common goal is to provide a guidepost for thought and action to help the individual fulfill life's highest goals and purposes.

Hinduism's tenets are the *yamas* and *niyamas*, considered a necessary step for fruitful yoga. They are codified in scriptures including the *Shandilya* and *Varaha Upanishads*, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Gorakshanatha, and the *Tirumantiram* of Tirumular. Patanjali included a shorter list of *yamas* and *niyamas* in his *Yoga Sutras*.

The ten *yamas* are restraints, providing a basic system of discipline for the instinctive mind: nonhurtfulness, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy until married, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderation of appetite and purity. The ten *niyamas* are positive observances, life-giving actions and disciplines. They are remorse, contentment, giving generously, faith, worship, listening to scripture, cognition, sacred vows, recitation of mantras and purifying austerities.

The sages did not teach that a fiery hell would await those who do not follow these principles, nor did they assure

that heaven's doors would open for those compliant. These are not laws. But if you follow them, don't be surprised if you find yourself living a better life.



A. MANIVEL

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Response to Lesson 3

I am impressed with the sincere honesty and frankness expressed in the text regarding the tragic violence of invasion, conquest and colonization of India. I particularly like the message of cultural persistence and continuity that this history conveys. This pamphlet also wonderfully recognizes the ability of school children to grasp true meanings in history and culture. Sometimes we omit too much information from our children in our desire to protect them; doing so harms them and disrespects their intellect. **Michael K. Ward, PhD**, Visiting Lecturer in History, California State University, Northridge



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Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is the fourth chapter in our series on Hindu history intended for use in US primary and secondary schools. Like preceding chapters, it openly discusses topics that are neglected or covered only briefly in current American curricula. We summarize the political history of India between 1850 and 1947, then tell the story of two influential men: Swami Vivekananda, who presented to the Western world a view of Hinduism as a tolerant, sophisticated faith, and Mahatma Gandhi, who taught the world the power of nonviolent political action. Finally, we explore Hindu food, dress, rites of passage and traditions. Overall, the student is provided a glimpse into the beliefs,

traditions, practices, and refined culture that enabled Hinduism to survive the onslaught of conquest and colonialism. This lesson was written and designed by the editorial staff of *HINDUISM TODAY* in collaboration with Dr. Shiva Bajrai, Professor Emeritus of History, California State University, Northridge, Los Angeles.

Academic reviewers: Dr. Klaus Klostermaier, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Manitoba; Dr. Jeffrey D. Long, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College; Dr. Anantaraman, Professor of Religious Studies, St. Olaf College; Dr. T.S. Rukmani, Professor and Chair in Hindu Studies, Concordia University; Dr. Michael K. Ward, Visiting Lecturer in History, California State University, Northridge; Educational Consultant: Justin Stein, Lecturer at Windward Community College, Hawaii, and former middle school teacher in New York.

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2010 HINDUISM TODAY 1-1



What You Will Learn...

1. Main Ideas

1. Movements and cultures before the British were superior to all other cultures.
2. Swami Vivekananda popularized the Hindu belief that all religions are valid paths to God.
3. Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence inspired independence in India and inspired nonviolent movements for freedom and civil rights around the world.

2. The Big Idea

Hindu ideas of conscience and religious tolerance have helped shape today's world.

Key Terms

satyagraha, a 19th-century Hindu religious movement.

3. Historical Timeline

1. Describe the conflict of ideas between Hinduism and British colonialism.

2. Identify the influence of Swami Vivekananda on modern Hinduism.

3. Explain how the Hindu concept of nonviolence inspired the Indian independence movement.

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DEV RAJ AGARWAL

Kumbha Mela

Beseeching Mother Ganga's Blessings

SPECIAL FEATURE

Following humankind's greatest festival to its source

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE IT ON EARTH, IN SCOPE, SCALE or magnitude. In an epic outpouring of devotion, fifty million people have attended the 2010 Kumbha Mela in Haridwar, a Hindu mass that outnumbers the population of all but the five largest countries of Europe. In the midst of the crowds, pilgrims found

blessings, quietude and karmic fulfillment. HINDUISM TODAY reports on the two streams that meet to create this magic: the mighty *akharas* with their remarkable sadhus and the Ganga river, which we traced all the way to its humble Himalayan source.



HINDUISM TODAY's team covered the 2010 Kumbha Mela from two perspectives. Correspondent Choodie Shivaram and photographer Dev Raj Agarwal joined the festival separately. We alternate between their unique narratives.

Summoned to the Mela

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, HARIDWAR

HINDUS HAVE ABSOLUTE BELIEF IN THE existence of *bulava*, a divine summons to visit the most sacred places of worship. Without this call, it is impossible for the visit to materialize. When I received an unexpected call asking for my presence at the Kumbha Mela at Haridwar this year, during the time of Maha Sivaratri no less, it felt like heaven beckoning.

I never dreamt that I would ever be part of this great event. My invitation had come from Sri Jayendra Puri Swamiji, the pontiff of Kailasa Ashrama Mahasamsthana in Bangalore, who informed me that he was being crowned *mahaman- daleshwar* on February 15, 2010, during the Kumbha Mela. I jumped at the chance to join his entourage, all other duties at home or work obliterated from my thoughts, and proceeded to Haridwar, foremost among seven holy places where the Melas take place.

This year's Kumbha Mela saw a prodigious attendance of more than 50 million devotees over the course of several weeks, densely populating the area where the event takes

place. Pilgrims came to seek blessings from the sea of sadhus present and, later, to take a holy dip of their own in the holy river which is itself a sacred entity, a Goddess. She is reverently called Ganga Ma, "Mother Ganga."

I could barely wait to join millions of fellow Hindus at this most sacred event. As we set out by road to this ancient site of pilgrimage 133 miles east of Delhi, we witnessed a swelling sea of devotees, all single-mindedly on the move to meet their appointment with the Gods. Pilgrims from all walks of life traveled long distances, withstanding physical discomforts such as sleeping in the open air at near freezing temperatures. They came

by train, bus, car, truck, tractor, bullock cart, bicycle and donkey. Many thousands traveled by foot, even without shoes. We marveled at the endless procession of men, women and children walking miles and miles, many with *kavadis* (offerings carried during the pilgrimage as a form of penance) reverently perched on their shoulders. What firm foundation,

what absolute faith makes those devotees undergo such hardships to reach Haridwar and partake in the Kumbha Mela despite all odds?

For many people, the Kumbha Mela is an event best watched on television. Vast crowds and scarce comforts are deterrents, especially to those coming all the way from the South of the subcontinent. Reports of stampedes, pollution in the Ganga and some unseemly stories about the pilgrimage discourage the faint-hearted. But for the mil-

lions who come, as I would learn for myself, those challenges are insignificant.

As I approached Haridwar, I could hear devotional chants in energetic unison, such as "Ganga Ma Ki Jai" or "Har Har Mahadev," enveloping the roads. When we drew closer to the holy city, this incessant, divine proclamation increased in decibels as the crowd of devotees grew denser. In several camps, loudspeakers played music or encouraging sermons, fanning the flames of faith's ardor. Huge billboards, posters and banners of different ashrams and sadhus welcomed devotees. I reflected that, for religious leaders seeking attention, the Kumbha Mela is a great opportunity to garner visibility and publicity.

When I finally arrived in Haridwar, I was struck by the intense spiritual vibrancy of the city. Devotion was evident everywhere, in the charged tunes of bhajans and spiritual discourses and in the intense ambience of piety that filled the air. I truly felt I had arrived at "Deva Bhumi," the world of the devas. It felt like a spiritual tornado. I could experience God everywhere.

In my mind, I could hear the echo of Mark Twain's words written after he experienced Kumbha Mela in 1895, 115 years back: "It is wonderful, the power of a faith like that, that can make multitudes upon multitudes of the old and weak and the young and frail enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys. It is done in love, or it is done in fear; I do not know which it is. No matter what the impulse is, the act born of it is beyond imagination, marvelous to our kind of people, the cold whites."



Where else could 50 million huddled people experience such private communion?



(Clockwise from upper right) The glistening ghats of Haridwar on the night of Mahasivaratri; a sunrise bathing at the Har ki Pauri ghat; reverently offering ganga jal to Surya, the Sun; women perform a Sivalingam puja on a street near the river; after the purifying bath, a couple perform their austerities and observances





DEV RAJ AGARWAL



Living at the Mela

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, HARIDWAR

HARIDWAR DURING THE MELA IS A beehive, teeming with activity all around. The city is packed with people, policemen in khaki-and-blue uniforms, pilgrims with heavy loads of baggage on their heads, unbearably loud speakers from all directions, busy restaurants and food corners, crowded bus stands and railway stations—everywhere you get the impression that there is no room left for anything more. Yet, the stream of devotees keeps coming. Everytime I decided to cover one part of the mela, I ended up disappointed, unable to finish even half of that area. There is so much to see.

One balmy afternoon, for example, I see a long row of sadhus moving unannounced, holding *kamandalus* in their hands—those oblong pots usually made from gourds, used to store water or sometimes for begging, traditionally a sadhu's only possession. Their chests are tightly tied with a network of black or brown ropes and colored cloth pinned to the ends of the ropes, swinging around the knees. They are performing a ritual called *bhiksha*, an ages-old custom, when representatives of the several *akharas* walk around and gather alms in the form of flour from all camps. They have to keep walking, without stopping and looking back. Other sadhus wait outside their camps and pour some wheat flour in the *kamandalus* as their *biksha*—gathering brothers pass by.

Both devotees and journalists actually move to Haridwar for some time during

the Kumbha Mela, often staying for months. People cook, sleep, study and do business in the camps; some die and some are born.

One can buy fresh milk, curds, butter, bread and vegetables from small shops inside the camp city. Hundreds of men and women are kept busy cleaning the streets all around. The common pilgrims seem to be more health conscious now. Very rarely did I see pilgrims drinking water from the taps in the camp city and elsewhere. Instead, most depended on bottles of mineral water and sweet beverages, sold everywhere at a premium.

Considering the temporary but exponential boom in the population of the area, organization is essential. This year's was the first Kumbha Mela under the administration of the new Uttarakhand state, carved out of Himalayan and adjoining districts of Uttar Pradesh on November 9, 2000, to become the 27th state of the Republic of India. The authorities were visibly strict in the running of the mela, perhaps intent on making a positive first impression.

As I walk through the sandy roads of Neeldhara camp, I can't help but think that the organizers did a good job. I am pleased to see the neatly constructed halls of various social and religious organizations. The festival covers over 52 square miles, divided in 35 sectors. Buses are busy ferrying pilgrims to and from distant camps. There are rows of fresh water taps and toilets in many places, newly constructed for the visitors. Official statistics tally 4,000 toilets, 32 police stations, 6 base hospitals and 35 fire stations. The Indian Space Research Organisation even took satellite pictures of the crowds

with the hope of improving the conduct of the festival in the future.

Most of the policemen were from Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. The official staff included 20,000 policemen coming from 17 different police forces, which sounds like a lot until you remember that 50 million people attended the festival. Not all of them at the same time, but on April 14, the last Shahi Snan, an estimated 15 million people gathered at Haridwar. I met a young police officer from Himachal who said he felt a little tense in such a difficult assignment, but at the same time happy to be able to visit the Kumbha Mela. It was common to see police personnel in their off hours becoming simple pilgrims, both men and women, taking a dip in the Ganga and performing various pujas.

The mela felt clean and safe. But if the basics are dutifully covered, the gathering still lacks simple amenities such as an information booth. Almost everybody who lands here looks lost, looking for information or hoping for a map, to no avail. Even those who have been here for weeks have little knowledge to offer, and just a rare few can point the way. "Camp layout maps should be displayed around," suggested a group of elderly men and women from Saurashtra, tired of walking in circles.

The renunciates themselves seem to be ahead in hosting and communication. Ashrams, *akharas* and sadhus now have their e-mails. And, of course, almost everyone now has a mobile phone, so they can always call a missing companion, be he a family member or a fellow swami, and ask the inevitable question: "Where are you?"

Humankind's largest gathering is among the most peaceful



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

(Clockwise from top left) A bath of vibhuti, holy ash, purifies and kindles the spirit; a line of sadhus during *biksha*, begging for flour; the orderly camps; pilgrims sleeping on the streets of Haridwar; most devotees face long trips to reach the Kumbha Mela, carrying large loads; the local train station during the festival; with their heads shaved, young brothers perform a puja on behalf of their deceased father's soul



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



CHOODIE SHIVARAM

The First Royal Bath

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, HARIDWAR

ON THIS YEAR'S KUMBHA MELA, THE first Shahi Snan (Royal Bath) coincided with the great night of Siva—an auspicious occasion matching a blessed astrological configuration. The first and most important Shahi Snan is when sadhus parade to the river by the thousands and jump into the holy Ganga.

February 12, 2010, is overcast and cold. In the barricaded sidewalks of the streets, thousands are en route to Har ki Pauri, the central ghat on the banks of the Ganga. Many pilgrims are annoyed, blocked from reaching Haridwar's most famous ghats during the bathing of the sadhus. Most of them do not dare to open their mouths in front of an army of police and paramilitary soldiers. In this superbly organized Kumbha Mela, there is a hint of military discipline, with ambivalent results.

As we pass through the camp of Juna Akhara, where thousands of sadhus are gathered, the loud chanting of "Har Har Mahadeva" is almost deafening, saturating the air with strong vibrations. A group of naga sadhus dances in frenzy, while some others display yogic postures in front of cameras. This was one of the most exotic spectacles I have ever seen. The whole scene is dominated by the grey and brown of the ash-smeared bodies and the deep, warm yellow of the marigold garlands. A large group of *sadhvis* watch from a corner. Soon, all *mahamandaleshwars* and senior sages come out and accept the greetings from the crowd of



Sadhus of the Juna Akhara during the first Shahi Snan. The holy trishul, symbolizing Siva, has the honor of touching the water before the sadhus.

nagas, taking their seats in the procession. The already loud voices reach a roar when one of the sadhus lifts the Juna Akhara's giant flag and four others shoulder the silver palanquin with the *akhara's* Deity: the time has come for the Shahi Yatra.

At the Har ki Pauri, where pressmen and photographers are battling for elbow room, the Juna Akhara's naga sadhus line up along the river and jump into the water as soon as the symbolic bath of the Deities is finished.

Then follow the *mahamandaleshwars*, sadhus and, finally, the devotees, thousands of people from the streets who have somehow sneaked into the Shahis during the procession and now feel privileged to take a bath along with these divine souls! I am entranced by the power and the devotion of this great spectacle. Until late in the evening, the *akharas* bathe, one after the other, first the Saiva *akharas*, then the Vaishnavas.

Eventually, everyone, sadhu or household-

er, poor or rich, famous or anonymous, gets their holy dip. Many Hindus make vows to take a bath in the Ganga after the marriage of their daughters, or to seek blessings for the salvation of departed relatives. Their resolve is often tested with severe challenges, and many are overwhelmed with emotions as they finish the cathartic, soul-cleansing bath. A dip in the Ganga during the Kumbha Mela, tradition says, washes away the karma of many births.

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, HARIDWAR

IDIDN'T SLEEP ALL NIGHT. THE THOUGHT of a dip in the Ganga at 4am on Maha-sivaratri inspired me to overcome the freezing weather, at five degrees Celsius, and jovially lead a group to the river. I told the other women that if they felt the water was too cold, they could just sprinkle some water on their heads, so they agreed to come.

Reciting the Ganga Lahiri mantra, we inched into the cold water, shivering and shrieking, chattering "Jai Ganga" and "Aum Namah Shivaya." And then the magic overtook me. I kept taking dip after dip, not just for me but on behalf of my parents, guru, children, relatives, friends and well-wishers. And at the exact moment when I offered *arghya* (ablution) on behalf of my parents—my father died recently—the temple bells of a Siva temple on the Ghat rang out loud. It was as though He acknowledged my prayers.

Later in the day, at 1:30 pm, I followed the Mahanirvani sadhus, from a distance, on their way to the river. The procession was beyond anything I ever imagined. Hundreds of thousands of sadhus and saints, representatives and devotees, hundreds of chariots formed an unending stream of people that went on for three miles, strongly protected by cautious policemen.

Through the narrow lanes of Haridwar, thousands watched expectantly, hands folded in reverence as the *julus* (procession) passed by. From the roof tops, flowers showered on the sadhus. We were on the inside of the police line, with lay members of the Mahanirvani Akhara. With us was an elderly *sadhvi* from Bengaluru, braving

the heat, the rush, the dust and the crowd. Those who had experience with similar situations had formed a ring of protection around us, keeping our mind away from the ghosts of stampedes.

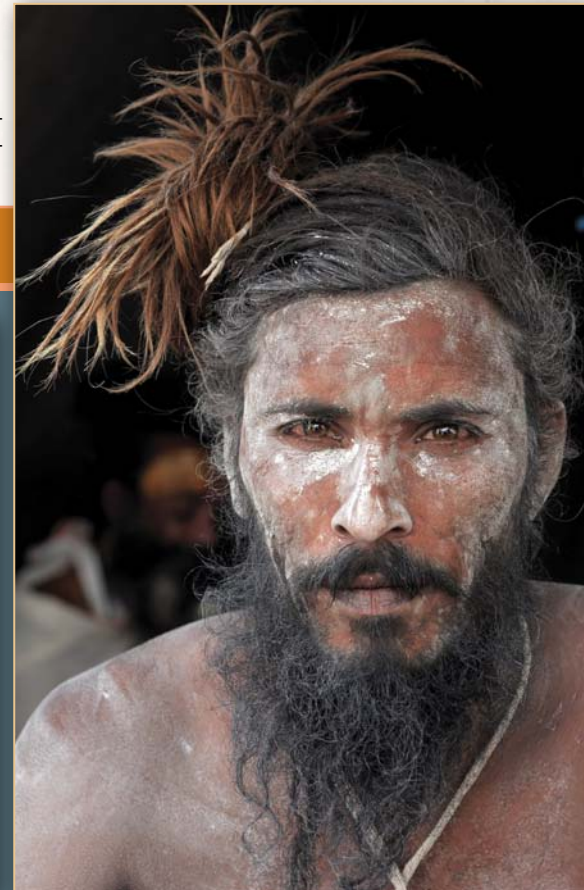
We finally arrived at the ghat. The Ganga was just there, the sadhus were there, I could see and almost touch them. This was, of course, the Royal Bath, and only the sadhus are supposed to be in the water.

But it was a miracle when a policewoman told us the elderly *sadhvi* could take a dip, with help from my husband and myself. We not only joined in the *julus* but could take the holy bath immediately after her. This was the high point of our life. It was euphoric. Nothing else existed. We had merged with God.

When I left Bengaluru for this pilgrimage, many among our friends and family warned about stampedes, risk of disease, lack of facilities, pollution—the list was long. I was unmindful of it all. Nothing could shake my faith in Ganga, in Siva, in our customs and traditions. No one could deter me, not even the freezing temperatures.

Arriving back home, no one would believe we had such a smooth experience of the Shahi Snan. I was struck by a magnificent spiritual force that must be experienced to be known.

The Kumbha Mela's anonymous monks and saints, as multifaceted as Hinduism itself



Spectacle and Spirit

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, HARIDWAR

AFTER A LONG WAIT OF TWELVE YEARS, the Kumbha Mela has returned to Haridwar. Its arrival changes the face of the city, an otherwise sleepy town that suddenly comes to life.

To attend a Kumbha Mela is a priceless opportunity. As a photographer, I find myself counting the days between these holy gatherings. More than the chance to take a sacred bath, it is also time to see the vast surge of humanity in different colors, a look into our diversified culture. When the time for the festival comes, thousands of holy men, ascetics, sadhus and nagas converge towards a holy city to be a part of the largest temporary family humankind has ever assembled.

But it is the pilgrims, so often ignored by the media, that bring the festival to life. There are distinctly two types of pilgrims here. The wealthier (or middle-class) come with a plan, joining the camp of a religious organization they know and staying in their accommodations, sometimes for weeks. They come to learn, to perform selfless service and, most of all, to spend some time near their guru. The majority of pilgrims are poor, humble, scarcely educated, the uninvited lot who travel to Haridwar on a shoestring budget. Their itinerary depends on how much they can spend, often just enough for a day



trip or couple days' stay. They are the spirit of the festival and the actual custodians of this age-old extravaganza. They arrive at a bus or railroad station and head straight-away for the bath, perform their austerities, then spend time visiting camps for the darshan of all the saints, ashrams, markets and holy gatherings they manage to find. They often flock around the big tents (called *pandals*) to hear words of wisdom from the many gurus. By night, they leave in a hurry, feeling blessed and energized with unseen boons they take home to share with their villages and extended families. The Kumbha Mela is a festival for everyone.

The festival actually began on January 14, 2010, on the day of Makar Sankranti. That was a cold and grey morning. When I arrived at the ghats by sunrise, just a few pilgrims were there, huddled around fires along the river. Little happens that early: most camps were still deserted, without the swamis and naga sadhus. Nevertheless, media staff from around the world were already camping in Haridwar, visibly excited with the assignment.

It is only in February that the renunciates and their *akharas* arrive in full force. It is a solemn occasion, a religious ritual of great significance. The symbolic declaration of an *akhara's* arrival, called the *peshwai*, is a

major point of the Kumbha Mela. All the *akharas* try hard to make their own *peshwai* a grand show and exhibit their importance and prowess in a large parade. Displaying their *akhara's* heritage through colorful processions, the renunciates march through busy streets with the *akhara's* flags held high, ash-smeared naga sadhus in the lead, followed by *mahamandaleshwars* and mahants in their gold and silver-laden chariots, with elephants and music adding verve to the show. After its *peshwai*, each battalion of sadhus establishes itself at the camp of its particular *akhara*, spread over a vast area. Colloquies, religious rites and deep philosophical conversations may then commence.

It is only after the *peshwais* that the common pilgrim fully realizes what it means to be at a Kumbha Mela. Sadhus are everywhere. Most pilgrims, usually busy with everyday life and mundane issues, bask in the opportunity to have *darshan* of all these great men whose sole objective is salvation. Anyone interested in Hinduism can learn much during the Kumbha Mela, and make his own life much simpler, just by seeing how renunciates solve the most complex issues in the simplest of ways. Their *bhashyas*, or teachings, condense countless years of wisdom into simple yet powerful statements, which many are willing to give freely to those who approach.

Westerners, too, find their place in the celebration. Actually, we now see more Westerners attending than ever before. Most are here following a specific saint and staying for extended periods, taking *diksha*, performing

seva and listening to the teachings, hoping to transform themselves and bring a little of the wisdom of the East to the madness of their lives in the West.

And if the Kumbha Mela now has people coming from abroad to join the faithful, an interesting inversion is happening: the media corps that covers the event is increasingly Indian. In the old days, only photographers from Europe and America would come, enticed and mesmerized by the visual spectacle. Illiterate in Hinduism, those reporters understood little of what happened. They focused on the sadhus' nakedness, on the massive crowds and the sheer grandeur of it all. Today it is common to see the Indian media covering the event as it is: the greatest religious festival on Earth. Their audience is more domestic than international. India, it seems, is now proud of the Kumbha Melas and has claimed them as her own.

Modern media plays a wide role in contemporary melas. Nagas are no longer camera shy and hostile to pressmen and photographers who approach them. They are happy to be photographed. Some of them inquire how much money the photographer is going to make from selling their pictures and politely ask for some—it's an opportunity as good as any to ask for alms, it seems.

The media have been wholeheartedly embraced by the festival. Many temporary camps of sadhus have television sets. Newspapers are delivered to the camps early in the morning, and saints and nagas curiously and hastily scan the pages, hoping to find their own pictures somewhere.



Awe-inspiring pomp and ceremony mingle seamlessly with serene inner devotion



(Counter-clockwise from left) A sadhu reads the morning newspaper, where he might find his own photo—the relations between sadhus and the media has evolved over recent years; high-tech cameras by the media room; oblivious to the spectacle, two women devotees privately perform the ancient ritual of offering a flower to the river; at sunrise, families like this one perform pujas on the behalf of the absent and the deceased; an aged lady is struck by devotion when witnessing the royal bath of the sadhus; the grand parade of the Niranjani Akhara marches through the streets; photographer Dev Raj Agarwal



A Unique Conclave

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, HARIDWAR

WAS OVERWHELMED BY THE MAGNITUDE and diversity of the Kumbha Mela. In a whirlwind of events that defy description, everything seems to happen at once, everywhere, both inside and outside of you. We, pilgrims, feel like we are an integral part of it. The power of the event certainly comes from the presence of the holy Ganga, ever-flowing and ever-giving; from the many pujas that never seem to stop; and also the date's special astrology. But, more than anything else, the mela's spiritual might is due to the presence of sadhus, swamis, glorious *akharas* and anonymous saints, fruit of their worship and *tapas*.

Not all the monks of the mela are naked sadhus. The religious orders present include thousands of robed swamis, brahmacharis, guru and sages. Pandits of all kinds gather at the banks of the Ganga, mixing freely in the most orderly chaos there can be. Pervading it all is a profound sense of tolerance.

But the most fascinating are the monks who amble, covered in ash, through the ghats of Haridwar. My first encounter with the naga sadhus happened at Maya Puri, an area housing hundreds of naga camps.

Maya Puri is named after a temple dedicated to Shakti, which is metaphorically said to contain Her heart and navel. Sadhus and saints visiting Haridwar invariably stop at the temple and pay obeisance; She is the city's protector, and it is at Her feet that most

sadhus take shelter.

Walking through the naga camp is an indescribable experience. The interiors are well kept and orderly. The one I visited had carpets, a shrine for pujas and a *havana kunda* where the holy fire is perennially lit, perhaps helping keep the place warm.

Sitting in small circles, renunciates gather to discuss matters of the soul. Perfectly dressed scholars and unabashedly bare sadhus dismiss all external appearances and engage in lively exchanges for hours, into the night and until daybreak. This is not a place ruled by the tick of the clock or the ding of coins. Religion and spirituality are all that matters here.

In the minds of most of us, Indian urban dwellers or Westerners, the Kumbha Mela is misconstrued as nothing but a religious event that brings together a plethora of naked, ash-smearing naga sadhus known for their extraordinary feats. The sensationalizing visual media makes an issue out of their nakedness. These naga sadhus are portrayed as unkempt, ash-smearing, bare-bodied, herb-smoking, aggressive men. What a different feeling I had when I finally met them in person.

The nagas are lost in their own world, oblivious to attention and publicity. Where do they come from, where do they go? The answers they give are vague. I spoke to many naga sannyasins. Some superior force blinded me to their nakedness. Maybe still hesitant about their fearsome appearance, I asked, "Why are people scared of you? Are you as dangerous as people believe?" The answer was calm and composed: "This is a wrong opinion. We consider ourselves a part

of Siva, Lord Shankara. We take cudgels only when there is a need to protect dharma. We are harmless warriors."

Seeming at once benign and menacing, naga sadhus are a mystery even to faithful Hindus. People believe that having their darshan brings good luck and alleviates problems. My friend Geetha Limbavalli, who had accompanied me from Bengaluru, firmly believed that her business woes would be solved by seeking blessings from one of the ash-smearing saints.

These mendicants follow strange and severe austerities. We came across two nagas referred to as *khade babas*, who have been standing for decades and rest their bodies by shifting their weight to ropes hanging from the ceiling, even for sleeping. Another sadhu has kept his right hand held straight up for 27 years, his nails now long and intertwined, grotesque and exotic. "We do it for God," they all say in one way or another, exuding an inner contentment beyond our understanding.

All naga sadhus I spoke to were calm and perfectly mannered. One of them assured me, in a long colloquy, that he has abstained from solid food for decades. He explained, "I do not do this for anyone or for any gain. I do it for myself, for the God within me. Lord Shankara is within us, why do you seek Him outside? Look within!" In the neat but simple camp, devoid of the luxuries of modern life, his statement rang wise and true.

As I took my leave, the naga asked me to garland him by placing a rudraksha mala around his neck. With an unanticipated feeling of devotion, chanting "Om Namah Shivaya," I garlanded him, and I felt blessed.

Nowhere else is it so evident that "Truth is one, and sages

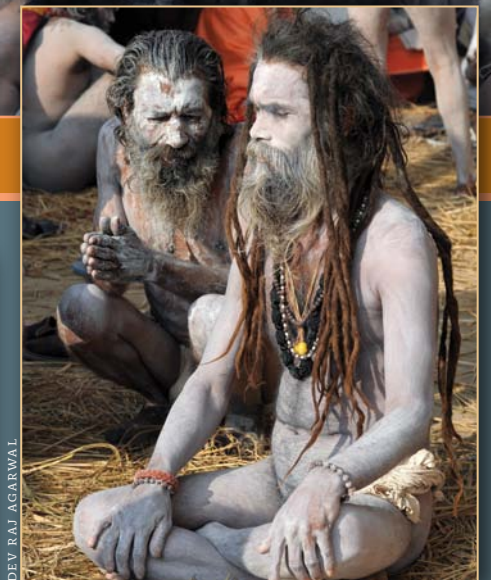
refer to it by various names" (Rig Veda)



CHOODIE SHIVARAM



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

(Clockwise from top) Sadhus of the Juna Akhara pay respects to their Acharya Mahamandaleshwar, Swami Avdheshananda (shaved head, center); an ash-smearing renunciate meditates in the sun; a lively chat among sadhus; debating high philosophy; a horn announces the peshwai parade



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



The Making of a New Mahamandaleshwar

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM, HARIDWAR
NEVERMIND THAT I WAS FLOORED BY the kaleidoscopic experiences at the Kumbha Mela: the main reason for my travel was to witness the coronation of Jayendra Puri Swamiji of Kailash Ashram, Bengaluru, as a *mahamandaleshwar* of the Niranjani Akhara.

Being part of his entourage, I was invited to stay at Jagadguru Ashram, where Swamiji studied during his initial years of *sannyasa*. The ashram is near the banks of Ganga in Kankhal, not quite two miles south of Haridwar. Kankhal houses the famous temple of Daksheshwar, the place where king

Daksha, Sati's father, performed the yagna without inviting Lord Shiva and where Sati (an incarnation of Parvati) immolated herself by entering the holy fire—or so the Puranic story goes. Jagadguru Ashram is now headed by Swami Raja Rajeshwar Ashram Maharaj, a contemporary of Jayendra Puri Swamiji and also a disciple of Swami's Sri Vidya teacher, Prakash Anandji Maharaj.

The morning of the coronation of Jayendra Puri Swamiji, February 15, 2010, began with a *navagraha homa* at Jagadguru Ashram. We then walked the streets of the holy city in procession, arriving at the Niranjani Akhara camp for the coronation. Senior dig-

nitaries and even *mahamandaleshwars* of other *akharas* joined us, in accordance with established practice, a custom that strengthens the amicable ties between the *akharas*.

The coronation is a dignified and essential ceremony in the mechanism of the *akharas*, but the celebration differs. Ordination into certain orders is austere and unpretentious, while others glare with pomp and ceremony. "It also depends on who is getting initiated and how he intends to mark his ascension," says Mehanth Ravinder Puri of the Mahanirvani Akhara. The sannyasin aspiring to be a *mahamandaleshwar* will also have to spend a considerable amount of money towards the ceremony. He must bear the expenses towards the arrangements, feeding of sadhus and nagas, travel arrangements of guests and sadhus.

The event began with an introduction of Jayendra Puri Swami and what made him eligible. The coronation ritual is, surprisingly, a simple process. Swamiji sat on the dais facing the *mahamandaleshwars*. Punyanandgiri Swamiji, Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of the Niranjani Akhara, sprinkled water and milk on him while mantras were chanted. "In earlier days it was a complete *abhishekam* performed with milk, curd, honey, etc, just as it is done in the temples to the Deities. Now the process is simplified," later explained Mahant Triyambak Bharati.

By the conclusion of this modest *abhishekam*, Sri Jayendra Puri Swami had been formally ordained as a *mahamandaleshwar*. He was led to seat among the other *mahamandaleshwars*. Immediately the other ma-

hamandaleshwars honored the newly ordained *mahamandaleshwar*, welcoming him into their fold. *Tada astu*—so be it!

It is only during Kumbha Mela that *mahamandaleshwars* are installed by the *akharas*. It is the highest traditional honor conferred on a sannyasin by an *akhara*, for his contribution to dharma and spiritual attainment. Literally, "*mahamandaleshwar*" means "superior of great (or numerous) monasteries." When and how the title was first created and evolved is not known. "It is a development of recent times," says Girshanand Swamiji of Mahanirvani Akhara. But some swamis disagree with this view, saying it began in some form with Adi Shankara.

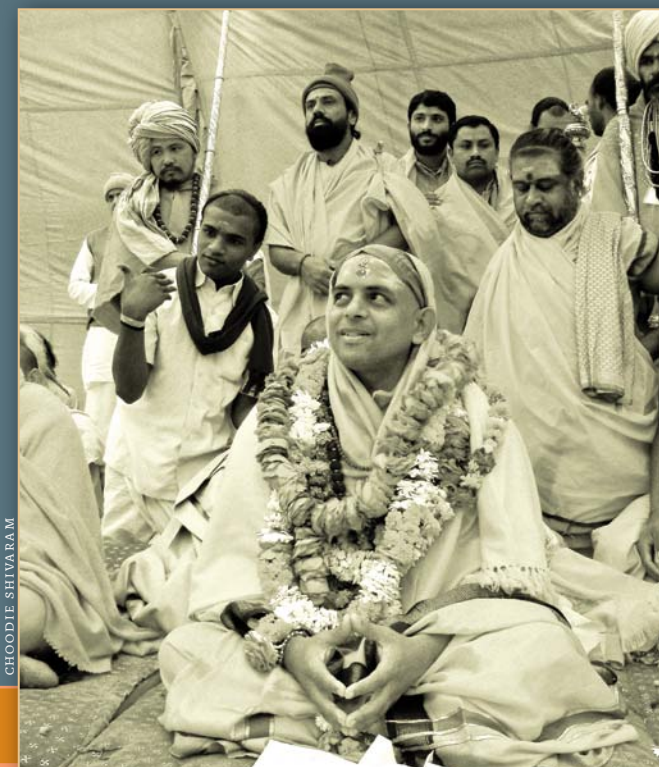
During this year's 42-day Kumbha Mela, *akharas* conferred *mahamandaleshwar* titles on many sadhus: the Juna Akhara to over 30, Niranjani to 17 and Maha Nirvani to 35. Though most of them are North Indian, in recent decades South Indian swamis have also been ordained, a process that unifies Hinduism across India. Women are also eligible. Famous saint Swami Nrishingh Givji gave *sannyas diksha* to Santoshi Mataji at the Kumbha in 1974, and that opened doors for women to join the ranks of the *akharas* all the way to the top.

Being a *mahamandaleshwar* is a lifetime commitment. They are expected to strictly abide by the disciplines laid down by their *akhara*. "A *mahamandaleshwar*'s life, karma and character should be in consonance with his elevation," says septuagenarian Mahant Triyambak Bharati, of the Niranjani Akhara. "His duty is to propagate and protect Sanatana

Dharma and spiritually elevate people. We confer this honor only after thoroughly verifying the complete background of the sannyasin." Harigiriji Maharaj, secretary of Juna Akhara, adds, "If a sannyasin elevated to *mahamandaleshwar* falls from grace or engages in *adharma*, an independent inquiry is held among the *akhara*'s chiefs, and the title may be withdrawn."

Even so, there seems to be a wide swath of styles among the *mahamandaleshwars*. Some parade around Haridwar in gold-plated chariots, or sit on gold and silver thrones balanced majestically atop elephants, attracting criticism from the locals. Soham Baba, a *mahamandaleshwar* of the Juna Akhara, recently made the cover of local newspapers after commissioning jewelry worth millions of US dollars, and even my rickshaw driver had something negative to say about that. When I asked one of Soham Baba's fellow *akhara* members about it, he pointed to his own tattered slippers. "I'm one of the *akhara* chiefs too, you know, his equal in rank. There is no need for such show, they don't last long."

Indeed, the extravagant and the mundane did find their place in the Kumbha Mela, sometimes in the person of those who have newfound



The akharas' venerable leaders

An *akhara* (literally "wrestling arena") is an organization of renunciate sadhus. The seven original *akharas*, Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Juna, Atal, Avahan, Agni and Anand, date back at least to 800 CE and likely much earlier. Today there are three major *akharas* (Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Juna) and three affiliated *akharas* (Atal affiliated with Mahanirvani, Anand affiliated with Niranjani, and Avahan affiliated with Juna). There are also numerous minor *akharas* that are either branches of the main ones or not traditional. The Juna Akhara has the largest number of sadhus, while the Niranjani is known for its vast inherited property holdings. "Almost half of Haridwar is owned by Niranjani," say local journalists.

Akharas are divided into different types according to their main Deity—Saiva *akharas* for followers of Lord Siva, Vairagi *akharas* for followers of Lord Vishnu and Kalpwasis, who follow Lord Brahma.

The seniormost person in an *akhara* is the

Acharya Mahamandaleshwar. He alone initiates new sannyasins and sadhus and speaks on behalf of the order. He is followed in the hierarchy by other *mahamandaleshwars*, *mandaleshwars* and mahants. All of these are considered rightful gurus. A council of

five, called the Sri Pancha, is the governing body of the *akhara*. Representing Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti and Ganesha, they are elected on every Kumbha Mela, to serve for four years.

The *naga* sadhus are expected to be adept



at both *sastras* (scriptures) and *shastras* (weaponry). Many go about unclothed, covered with *vibhuti*, the holy ash. When Adi Shankara set out to counter the dominance of Buddhism, he took the help of these sadhus, who to this day undergo strict physical, mental and spiritual training. The *nagas* embody strong will, single-minded devotion and sacrifice. The Kumbha Mela is the sacred religious gathering of the *akharas*, the only occasion when all of its members meet.

(Clockwise from top right) Sri Jayendra Puri Swamigal, mahamandaleshwar of the Niranjani Akhara; Sri Swami Avdhesanananda, Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of the Juna Akhara; a female mahamandaleshwar of the Niranjani Akhara is paraded; a conclave of the mahamandaleshwars of the Avahan Akhara; the Avahan Akhara carrying their Deity during the julus



From the Source

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, GANGOTRI

TO CLOSE THIS REPORT ON THE KUMBHA Mela, HINDUISM TODAY went where there are no crowds and the pristine river is still called Bhagirathi, renamed as Ganga only further downstream. The river is the ruling Goddess of a large and picturesque mountain terrain in the Himalayas, where it originates in the lap of snow-capped summits. The terminus of the long glacier that gives birth to the river is called Gomukh, literally meaning cow's mouth, situated at the base of the three Bhagirathi peaks of the Uttarkashi district in Uttarakhand. It was there, a story from time immemorial tells, that sage Bhagirath meditated for years to beg Lord Siva for a river to flow from the heavens and cleanse the ashes of King Sagar's 60,000 sons, who had been killed by a wrathful *siddhar*. Bound to their mortal remains, Sagar's sons had wandered ever since as ghosts, waiting for a proper disposal ceremony. Pleased with Bhagirath's selfless and dedicated effort, Lord Siva made the mighty waters of the river gradually trickle down through His coiled hair, cleaning the ashes, fertilizing the soil and bringing untold blessings to humankind.

Gomukh is a highly revered place to this day, often recommended by gurus for meditation because of its strong vibration and wild, pure atmosphere. It is situated 12,770

feet above sea level, and its temperatures are low. Devoid of trees, its wide open valley is mostly hidden behind the vertical wall of the glacier. To the east is the magnificent meadow of Tapovan, from which rises a glorious Sivalinga *parvat* (mountain). The water melting from the glacier results in no more than a small stream that meanders silently through the rocks.

About half a mile downstream is a village called Bhagirathi, the river's namesake. There one finds a few residential facilities and the Lal Baba Ashram. This is the place to see the charm of a river that becomes the lifeline of many millions during its journey to the sea, 2,510 km away. There are innumerable snowy peaks all around, extending as far as the eye can see. The fauna and the flora here are largely untouched. This is a protected area, the 924-square-mile Gangotri National Park.

Many smaller streams of melted ice join the Bhagirathi as it runs down to the next inhabited enclave, Gangotri, altitude 10,000 feet, the abode of Goddess Ganga and a center of pilgrimage. During the warmer months, pilgrims by the thousands come to Gangotri to take a holy dip in pure Ganga *jal* and have a glimpse of the Goddess Ganga in the imposing local temple.

As we descend from the altitudes of the river's cradle, the topography changes. The icy peaks are replaced by large trees, mostly cedars. Further down is a town called Mukhwa, reminder of a bygone era, where rustic wooden houses overlook the wide valley.

This is said to be Goddess Ganga's winter abode: soon after Diwali, as snowy winters approach, a ritual is performed to bring Her to the beautiful local temple. Chanting mantras and singing folklore songs, local women lead the pro-

cession from Gangotri to Mukhwa. Atop a silver palanquin sits the Goddess, along with her consorts, Annapurna and Sarasvati. Bagpipers from the army are a peculiar addition to the caravan, but no one here seems to mind the cultural mismatch.

The journey takes a few days. One night the caravan halts at a small place called Diyan. The local temple comes to life the next morning as people from a nearby village rush to the tiny courtyard, carrying the palanquins of their village Deities which will be recharged by the presence of the Goddess. Similar celebrations and adorations accompany the caravan on its journey. A short stop is made at another temple, where Goddess Annapurna will stay. A large crowd is already waiting for her. The other two Goddesses, Ganga and Sarasvati, will finally reach Mukhwa, where a jubilant celebration awaits. There they remain until summer.

The unsurpassed beauty of the valley of the Bhagirathi reaches its peak around Mukhwa. Studded with thick forests of cedars and firs, the valley widens up to a flat, level ground, humbling the river to a wide and silent stream. After that, the Bhagirathi once again enters a narrow valley, so far avoiding the perils of several hydroelectric dam projects in the area, and reaches Deoprayag. There, empowered by its affluent Alaknanda, the Bhagirathi becomes the Ganga, India's immortal river.

The next major spot along its banks is Rishikesh, an old seat of learning in a warm deep valley. Rishikesh relieves Mother Ganga of all the hardships of hilly terrain; there, the river becomes calm. Finally, after cutting through dense subtropical forests known for a rich variety of wildlife, the Ganga enters the plains of North India at Haridwar, home to the 2010 Kumbha Mela.

(Background) These waters have come down from the mighty Himalayas since before recorded history, bringing abundance and blessings; (clockwise from top right) water springs forth to begin the river; the Bhagirathi appears blue for a short while, soon collecting the silt that will give its characteristic gray color; locals parade a murti of Goddess Ganga from Gangotri to Mukhwa; a devotee pays his respects and asks for blessings; Bhagirathi and the local ashram; a lonely sage meditates, imbibing the sacredness of the timeless surroundings



ALL PHOTOS: DEV RAJ AGARWAL





MOVIES

“Sita Sings the Blues” to Rave Reviews

Nina Paley’s solo production of Sita’s story from the *Ramayana* is an enchanting, irreverent animated movie that Hindus either love or hate

Nina Paley is half revelation, half revolution. A Western woman who took an Eastern story and with a personal computer single-handedly animated a full-length film that received accolades from Roger Ebert and attacks from conservative Hindus, a story that morphed into a protracted fight with Sony and others about copyrights, catapulting the artist into an Internet hero and her struggle into a cause célèbre for Creative Commons, a flexible rights model being evolved to meet the needs of a digital era. Come as we share the tale, the adventure, the trials of Nina Paley’s *Ramayana*.

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

WHEN YOU SEE SITA RISING FROM THE ocean on a lotus, you are struck by her beauty and the sheer limpid depths of her eyes. A whimsical, record-playing peacock is nearby, the bird’s neck the tone arm and beak the stylus, scratching out the liltingly lyrical music to which Sita gently gyrates. The song, sung in the honey-rich, plaintive voice of Annette

Hanshaw, the popular blues singer from the 1920s, is *Mean to Me*: “Moanin’ Low, my sweet man I love him so/though he’s mean as can be/He’s the kind of man needs a kind of woman like me/a woman like me....”

Welcome to Nina Paley’s animated film, *Sita Sings the Blues*—yet another retelling of India’s great epic, *Ramayana*, narrated as “the greatest breakup story ever told.” Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it, as some have done, *Sitayana*—for it tells the tale from the perspective of Sita, not unlike the oral retellings through the ages by village women that made Sita the focus of the story. Only, here, the story is told through the jazz tradition of “torch songs,” of a lovely, smoky-voiced lament at home in a dark New York lounge or bar, not the rural outposts of India.

This low budget movie (see it for free at sitasingstheblues.com), conjured up on the computer by a single animator/artist over the course of five tedious years, has made big waves. It’s probably one of the most awarded and lavishly reviewed little films of the year. It has won fans and great praise—along with

ample scorn and hate mail.

Roger Ebert, the famed Chicago critic, blogged his reaction: “I am enchanted. I am swept away. I am smiling from one end of the film to the other. It is astonishingly original.” He named it as one of the ten best animated films for 2009.

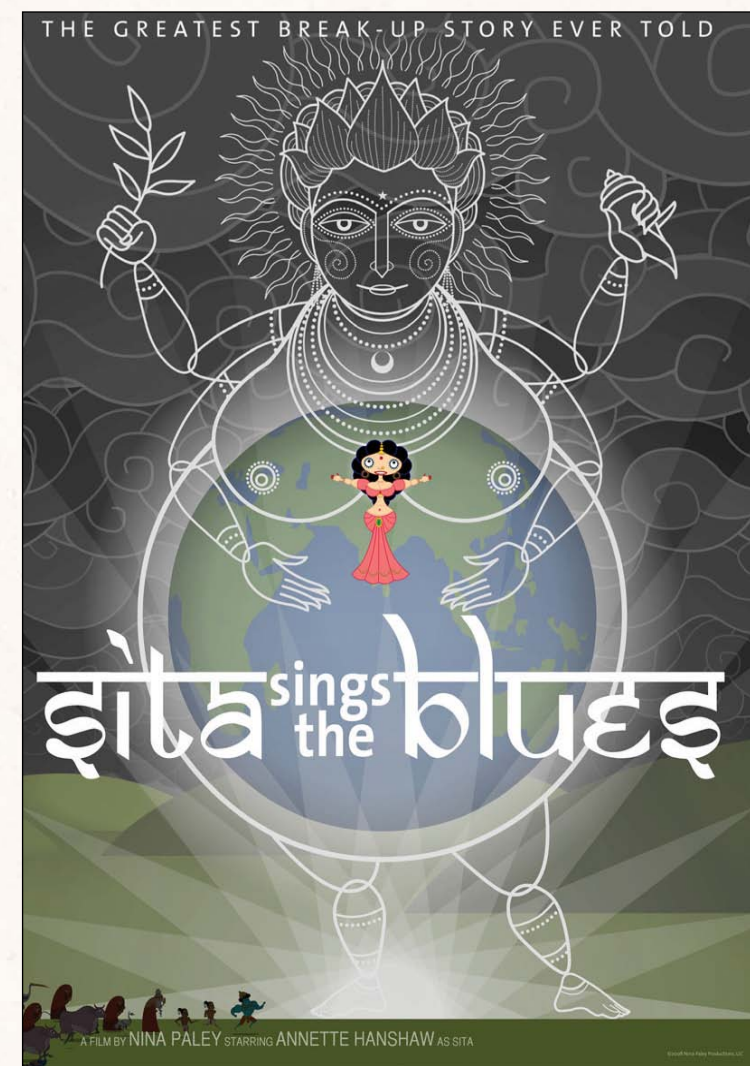
Watching the film, you are amazed at the lush details, the rich landscapes, the bloody battles, the burning city of Lanka and the cast of thousands, including strange demons and the mighty monkey army. All this was pulled off by a petite woman named Nina Paley, who became producer, director, creator, editor, songwriter and marketer for this whimsical little animated meteor.

The film is like a child’s kaleidoscope—twirl it around and those unmatched, multicolored pieces of glass mutate and form the most amazing, unexpected patterns. Many different influences, emotions and memories—past and present—have gone into this unorthodox retelling of the *Ramayana*, depending a lot on intuition and serendipity.

Paley is a syndicated comic strip art-



A modern Valmiki? (left to right) The assembled Gods vouch for Sita’s purity after her imprisonment in Lanka; Nina Paley with Bruno the cat, who has a part in the movie; poster showing Sita returning to her mother, the Earth



ist (*Hots, Fluff*), an award-winning short film-maker (*Storks*), a professor at Parsons School of Design and a 2006 Guggenheim Fellow. Ask her about her witty, slightly irreverent retelling of the *Ramayana* and she mulls aloud, “Well, I think really good stories are living things. The *Ramayana* has been alive for 2,000–3,000 years, maybe even longer. It is a living story, and that’s the trait of really good stories—they live in all these different versions.”

So what was the route which brought Paley to the *Ramayana*? She grew up many light years away from this text, in Urbana, Illinois. The daughter of a math professor, she lived on the campus of the University of Illinois. She recalls, “Even though it’s in the middle of corn country, it was in some ways a cosmopolitan, academic town with professors from all over the world, including Asian and South Asian professors.” She even had Indian friends as roommates in college.

The daughter of atheist parents of Jewish heritage, she didn’t develop an interest in religion till her late teens. She took some

religious study classes in college, but religion frightened her initially.

“Why would you believe in some power that could be capricious and malicious? I have enough trouble pleasing my parents and my teachers, why would I want to add to that and need to please God all the time?” she asks about that early questioning. “But growing older, I became interested in my judgments, and my fascination increased.”

Paley explored the literature of different religions—“That’s another way of saying myths. That’s not saying they are not true, but they are stories with a spiritual component. I feel the stories really talk about being human. I don’t identify with any religion, but I do have spiritual experiences and I find myself relating to all kinds of religious stories—not just the *Ramayana* but also Biblical stories. There’s a lot to relate to.”

Curious and open to all the religions, she still doesn’t want to identify with any one to the exclusion of the others: “I’m not into the dogma part of religion or being in an adversarial relation with others. I’d rather

have none and explore all, rather than be attached to one, to the exclusion of the others,” she says. Of religious mythologies, she says: “I’m moved by them. I think what the stories are talking about is another layer of reality—I don’t take them literally—I think all religious stories are talking about deeper aspects of humanity.”

A Woman Scorned

So how did this American version of the *Ramayana* come about? Paley first encountered the epic in 2002 when she followed her husband, an animator, who had been transferred to Trivandrum, India. While visiting New York for work, she had a cryptic e-mail from him telling her not to come back. It was abandonment by e-mail. Devastated, she started seeing parallels between her own life and that of Sita, who was basically abandoned by Rama after she had been abducted by Ravana, the King of Lanka, and her “purity” was in question.

This was a sad, dispirited time for Paley. She could not return to their apartment in



Rama rescues the rishis: (clockwise from above) At the beginning of the story, several rishis living in the forest call upon Rama to rescue them from demons; Rama and Sita enjoy a happy stroll through the forest; (inset) 1930s cartoon character Betty Boop; Ravana carries off Sita as she drops her jewels along the way; Ravana tries to convince Sita to give up Rama

San Francisco, since it had been sublet, so she slept on the sofas of friends in New York. In one such home, she encountered the vocals of Annette Hanshaw and identified with them completely. Hanshaw was one of the first popular jazz singers, well liked in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Like the pieces of a puzzle, Hanshaw's sad, lamenting lyrics fit in totally with Paley's story—and with that of Sita. "I thought it was so obvious, I was surprised that no one had combined them together before," she says. She found it cathartic to work at the computer on her own personal *Ramayana*, and bit by bit it came into being.

Ramayana tells the story of Prince Rama, who has been banished to the forests for 14 years due to a boon given to his stepmother by his father, King Dasharatha. Ever the good son, Rama heads to exile with his loving wife Sita, who insists on accompanying him. When Sita is abducted by the ten-headed Ravana, King of Lanka, Rama battles the evil forces and gets her back. But the relationship is never the same, for doubt about his wife's fidelity has set in, and Rama, ever the king and Ideal Man, feels he must uphold the moral dharma.

Paley's rendition is not so much feminist as personal. She sees herself in Sita; and in Rama, she sees all callous, spouse-abandon-

ing men—including her ex-husband (who actually signed off on the film). Paley's focus is on Sita and her inner struggles revealed through song. As she writes, "Sita's story moves from total enmeshment and romantic joy (*Here We Are, What Wouldn't I Do for That Man*) to hopeful longing separation (*Daddy Won't You Please Come Home*) to reunion (*Who's That Knockin' At My Door*) to romantic rejection (*Mean to Me*) to reconciliation (*If You Want the Rainbow*) to further rejection (*Moanin' Low, Am I Blue*) to hopeless longing (*Lover Come Back to Me*) back to love—this time self-love (*I've Got a Feelin' I'm Fallin'*).

The film came into being as Paley listened to these songs in her friend's apartment. She feels there could be no film without them, because they capture the emotions so well. One wonders what Annette Hanshaw's reaction would have been to the movie. Paley says, "Hanshaw didn't have any children, but her nephew told me that Annette would have liked it. I was very pleased with that."

What gives the movie its bite is that Rama is portrayed with little sympathy, though his reasons for abandoning Sita are voiced by the puppets. They offer the traditional view: as the king, Rama had to remove any source of criticism in his personal life, even if that required abandoning his pregnant wife.

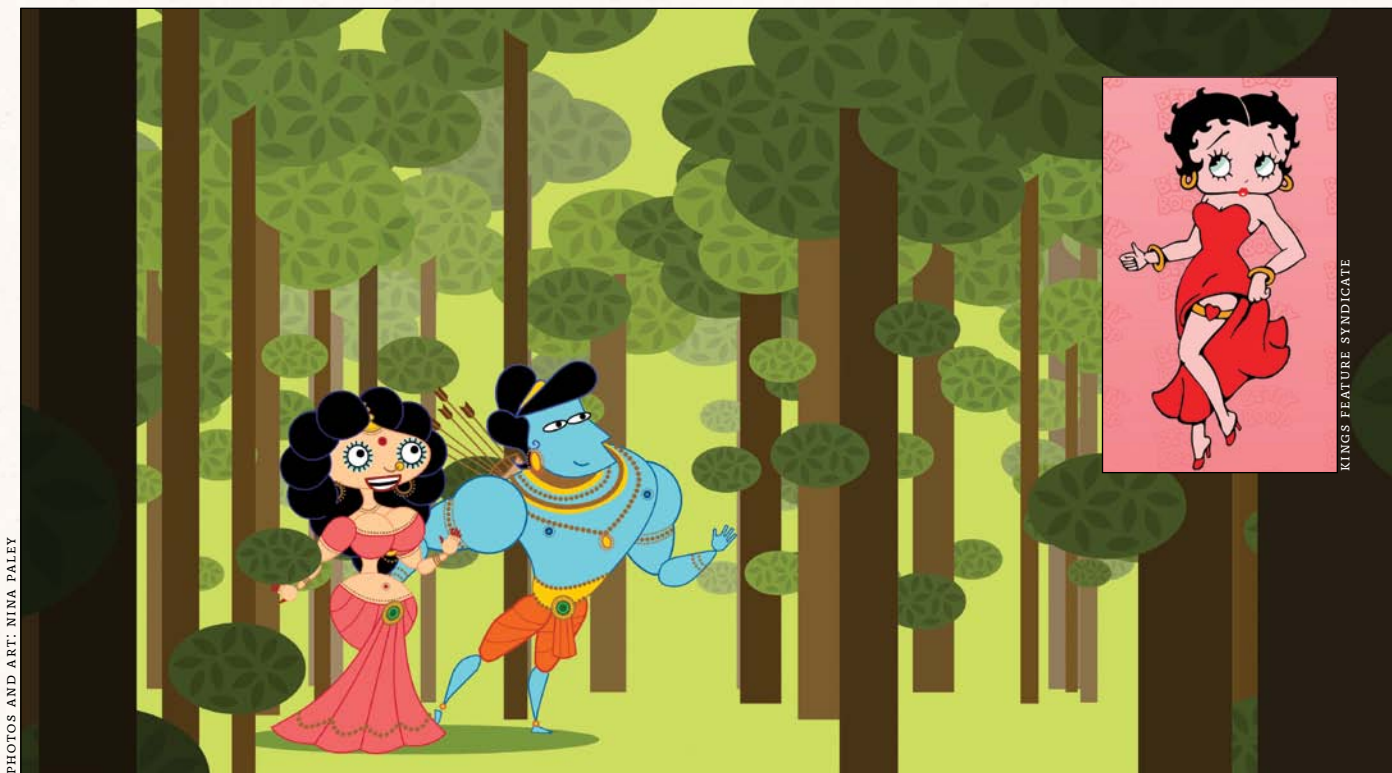
A Medley of Animation Styles

Paley's film juxtaposes several different animation styles, ranging from ancient Mughal renderings to a hasty, hand-drawn, squiggly animation used to tell the subplot of her own love, marriage and abandonment. "I wanted to give a little taste of the different styles of *Ramayana* that exist—different times, regions and traditions," she says, mentioning the different *Ramayana* art she had seen during her research. "I also wanted to keep myself from being bored!"

While most of the animation is computer generated, the Mughal miniature figures were hand-drawn on parchment paper using antique water colors and were quite time consuming.

Indeed, the different styles actually reflect Paley's experience of the *Ramayana*. "It's not as if I grew up with the *Ramayana*," she explains. "I came to the story when I was 34. The first one I read was a comic book; and since then, I have read different *Ramayanas* and talked to different people about the *Ramayana*—and no two stories were the same, and that just gets reflected in the film."

As times change, perhaps there will be more and more ways of telling ancient stories. Nabaneeta Dev Sen gives an analysis of the many interpretations women have made of the *Ramayana* in her *Manushi* magazine es-



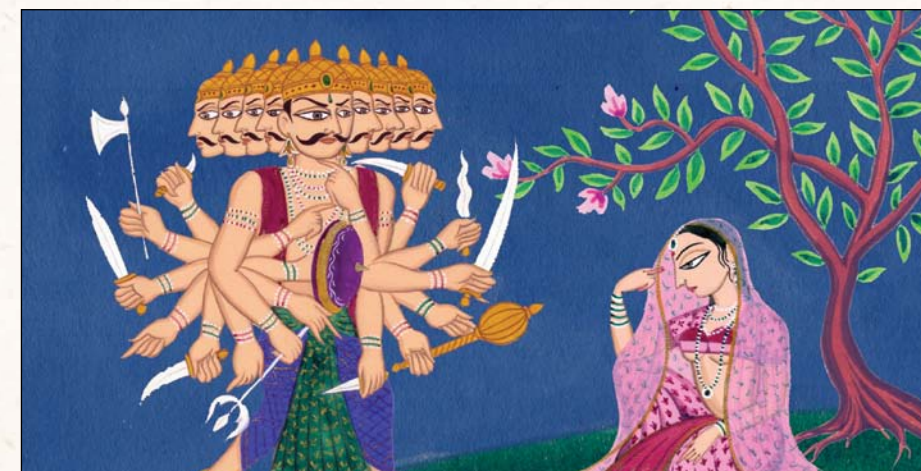
PHOTOS AND ART: NINA PALEY

Art Styles

THE MOVIE IS SET IN SEVERAL different styles of art. The most prominent is the modern computer-illustrated style at top. Here Sita is based upon an old cartoon character Betty Boop (inset), who first appeared in 1930 and was, like Hanshaw, a jazz singer. A second style (middle) comes from the *Amar Chitra Katha* comic books. It is complete with the half-tone screen (dot pattern) of the inexpensively produced series. Paley uses the style in a kind of collage.

The third technique follows the Indo-Islamic art style developed under the patronage of the Mughal emperors of the 16th to 18th centuries. Paley painstakingly created the art herself and worked it into her animations. A fourth influence, seen on page 35, is the Indonesian shadow puppet, *wayang kulit*. These puppets are commonly used in retellings of the *Ramayana*.

The resulting movie is a bit of a mash-up from an artistic point of view. It works in large part because of the deft use of Hanshaw's singing and the shadow puppet commentators.





PHOTOS AND ART: NINA PALEY

say, *Lady Sings the Blues: When Women Retell the Ramayana* (www.ninapaley.com/Sitayana/Manushi_LadySingsTheBlues.html). "There are always alternative ways of using a myth. If patriarchy has used the Sita myth to silence women, the village women have picked up the Sita myth to give themselves a voice. They have found a suitable mask in the myth of Sita, a persona through which they can express themselves, speak of their day-to-day problems, and critique patriarchy in their own fashion." Nabaneeta never thought an American would do just that.

The Songs Copyright Fight

Annette Hanshaw's stirring songs, so tightly woven into the movie, proved to be another trial by fire for Paley. Only after pouring all her resources into *Sita Sings the Blues* did she learn that releasing it was illegal: though the recordings of the songs were in the public domain, the lyrics were not.

Unable to pay the huge amount demanded to license the lyrics, Paley decided to resolve the copyright impasse by donating her film to the public. It can be seen and downloaded freely on the Internet, and it has been shown at countless film festivals, winning many awards. The law prohibits its entry into the Academy Awards.

Paley's offering of her work to all is in the tradition of the *Ramayana* itself—a story freely shared by all through the centuries. "Imagine if the *Ramayana* was copyrighted, nobody would be able to share it—there

wouldn't be all those diverse retellings," she elucidates. "I think the *Ramayana* aspect of the movie did make me open up more to the idea of freeing up my movie."

Paley finally went into debt to completely "decriminalize" her film, paying a negotiated fee of \$50,000 and almost \$20,000 in legal fees for the right to use the songs in the film and market it freely. She says, "Having paid off the licensors, I could have chosen conventional distribution. But I chose a Creative Commons license to allow the film to reach a much wider audience; to prohibit the copyrighting—'locking up'—of my art; to give back to the greater culture which gave to me; to exploit the power of the audience to promote and distribute more efficiently than a conventional distributor; and to educate about the dangers of copy restrictions, and the beauty and benefits of sharing."

As the poster child for shared culture, artist/activist Paley has gained fans and fame. Word of mouth has built up the buzz, and speaking engagements as well as revenue sharing, artwork and product sales are in the works. She is proving that society rewards artists who refuse to sell their soul.

How She Made the Film

Paley's film came about very much by serendipity as she encountered second-generation South Asian actors and dancers in New York City, and found the voices in them for her Gods, kings and demons. While Valmiki's Ram and Sita are consistently good (and

hence a trifle boring), Paley's Ram and Sita are more human and show the mixed emotions, angst and egos of real humans.

Paley enlisted three New Yorkers, Manish Acharya, Bhavna and Aseem Chhabra, to improvise and offer their thoughts on the *Ramayana*, its characters, their halos and their warts. These became the voices of three Indonesian shadow puppets in the film, irreverent and outspoken commentators on the *Ramayana*, bringing it right into today's contemporary world. Amazingly, these critical scenes were not scripted, but recorded spontaneously.

"We sat in a recording studio and she threw questions at us in chronological order—who was Dasharatha? How many wives? How many sons?" recalls Chhabra. "Our responses, which became a part of the narrative of the film, were completely improvised, unprepared and organic. At some stage we started giving a human face to the characters from the religious text. Then it was Nina who decided how to use our conversations—as a narrative to bind together the three different strains of animation."

Chhabra, an entertainment writer, believes the film is unique—funny, creative and, overall, respectful of the *Ramayana* story while viewing the narrative from Sita's perspective. While *Sita Sings the Blues* has received many awards, it has been through a ton of trouble and also been vilified in some circles. Yet its very existence tells us something about Paley's tenacity and sheer chutzpah.

Rescue and banishment: (left) Hanuman consoles Sita while she is imprisoned in Lanka; (top right) a shadow puppet commentator explains Rama's dilemma in taking Sita back following her abduction by Ravana; (bottom right) in a scene protested by some Hindus, Rama walks over the pregnant Sita before sending her off to the forest

"Nina truly enjoys controversy, and nothing scares her," says Chhabra. "She has gone through so much financial hell making this film. But it is wonderful to see her get recognition and love from the audience and the critics. She is a rare filmmaker, who always wants to share the accolades with her cast and crew."

That a single animator/artist could create an entire 80-minute film is only possible in the age of high-powered personal computers. Paley started with a Macintosh PowerBook G4 laptop in 2002 and completed the 1920 x 1080 rendering in 2007 on a 3 GHz Intel-powered Mac Pro tower. She worked mostly in Flash (creating over 500 individual files) from original watercolor paintings she rendered by hand and scanned in, using After Effects for the animations. People accustomed to hundreds of names on a film's credits marvel at her achievement, but she notes that great novels have historically been done by dedicated individuals, and computers make moviemaking on a par with complex novel writing.

A Hindu Backlash

One Hindu group called it "derogatory and extremely insulting to Hindu culture." The movie has been shown in some private settings in India but has not been distributed there yet in any centralized way. It has generated a lot of comments on the Internet, including personally abusive comments. "You should see the ones I haven't published," she laments. "They are grotesque!"

Positive comments have outweighed the negative ones. "The *Ramayana* is complex, dynamic, and relevant to life today, and the film exemplifies this," one viewer wrote after watching a segment on YouTube. "All Hindus should be happy that it still resonates around the world."

"Grow up! The world is changing all around you! Your old voice will not be able to continue unless you adapt to new ways of telling old stories!" wrote another.

"In India a holy book, even *Ramayana*, was never considered to be unchangeable.... in fact, almost 200 versions of *Ramayana* exist all over India, each having a different depiction and even a different character assuming the central role.... so no need to be so touchy," wrote yet another viewer.

To those who criticize Paley for show-



ing Sita as curvaceous and scantily clad, she points out that she uses three different forms of animation to depict Sita—including a well-covered Indian Mughal miniature-style. She uses the more buxom version during the jazz musical numbers to highlight the heroine's physical beauty. "It makes overt what Sita's burden was. She is so pure and devoted to Rama, and she's so attractive. It was her beauty which caused Ravana to objectify her and steal her—she was really a pure soul."

Paley points out that many ancient texts, including the Sanskrit Valmiki version, of which there is an elaborate English translation online, depict Sita's physical endowments in great detail. She reasons, "We consider that depiction of the woman degrading to women somehow—showing these aspects of women is considered bad—yet why should a womanly depiction be anything to do with her character?"

Paley says the film has no agenda, let alone a feminist agenda. She does put harsh words into the mouths of Luv and Kush, about how their father treated their mother. "The *Ramayana* devotes pages and pages to how righteous he was, that he was a perfect man, and the fact that he abandons his wife seems to be no big deal. No matter what Rama does, he is praised."

One could say it's a *Ramayana* for our times. We've all seen the image of the mighty Lord Vishnu reclining on the Sesh Naga with Lakshmi massaging His feet. In Nina Paley's ending, you have Lakshmi reclining on the Sesh Naga with Lord Vishnu massaging Her feet! There is a delicious irony in this, and somehow Nina Paley gets the last laugh.

Lavina Melwani is a New York-based journalist who writes for several international publications and blogs at www.lassiwithlavina.com

Modern Matchmaking

Hindu Ways of Arranging Marriages, Traditional and Contemporary



FROM SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI'S *LIVING WITH SIVA*, WITH EXCERPTS FROM KAVITA RAMDYA'S *BOLLYWOOD WEDDINGS*; RAJINI VAIDYNATHAN'S *WE JUST CLICKED*; AND THE EIGHT STEPS OF THE TRADITIONAL MATCHMAKING PROCESS



I remember reading a cartoon a number of years ago in which two parents were telling their daughter, "You can marry anyone you want as long as he's a brahmin." The family, of course, was of the brahmin caste. Certainly the tradition of marrying within one's caste, or *jati* (occupation), and community (language group), is still the strongest one in our global Hindu community. New trends, however, are also manifesting, as our article points out. For example, it is common these days to marry someone of your own profession, often having met each other in graduate school. MBA's marry MBA's; MD's marry MD's. The *jati* of birth might be quite different for each and also the language group in India—however what the couple has in common is working in the same profession, a new form of caste system so to speak. On the other hand, a religious community that marries into itself, such as devotees of the same guru *parampara*, can provide a continuity of religion and culture over a period of many lives for the reincarnating souls enabling these souls to maximize their spiritual progress. ¶ Our general advice: the greater the difference in cultural and religious backgrounds, the more important it is that the couple take time to get to know one another before marriage takes place.

SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

ART & PHOTO CAPTIONS BY
SHEELA VENKATAKRISHNAN OF CHENNAI

Marriage in the Hindu Tradition

From Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Living with Siva*

MARRIAGE IS A UNION NOT ONLY OF A BOY AND GIRL, BUT OF their families as well. Not leaving such crucial matters to chance, all family members participate in finding the most suitable spouse for the son or daughter and thereafter commit hearts and minds to assist in times of need. Marriage is a sacred covenant which all relatives take up the responsibility to care for and protect. It is one of the most sacred events of life. Through the homa rite at the marriage ceremony, the priest invokes the Gods. The elders, the priests, the Gods, the devas, the planets and even cows witness the couple vow themselves to holy, harmonious matrimony for the rest of their lives. Thus, divorce or annulment are considered out of the question. The *Rig Veda* intones: "United your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be one, that you may long together dwell in unity and concord" (10.191.4).

While not all marriages must be arranged, there is wisdom in arranged marriages, which have always been an important part of Hindu culture. Their success lies in the families' judgment to base the union on pragmatic matters which will outlast the sweetest infatuation and endure through the years. Compatibility of culture and education is also taken into consideration. A spouse is generally sought from within the same religious community. The man and woman should at least be of the same religious sect for long life and a happy marriage. This may not seem important if both are not religiously active, but conditions will tend to change in future years, especially after children are born, and the disparity can lead to separation and divorce. Most families begin early in finding the proper mate for their children among families they know and esteem for the kinship bonds the marriage would bring. Those involved ponder whether the two families can blend into a one family harmoniously with benefits to both. Stability is enhanced if the groom has completed his education, established earnings in a profession and is at least three years older than the bride.

Seeking the Best Match

In arranging a marriage, the families consult astrologers regularly until a match is found. Sometimes the boy and girl are allowed to get to know each other long before they are aware that a marriage is being arranged for them. Of course, if they do not get along well, the matter is dropped and the search is on again. If one match is not agreeable, another is sought. The inner-world devas also help to

arrange the best matches. Most traditional astrologers have one or more devas assisting them to provide knowledge from the *akashic* records and insight into the planetary powers that impel karmas.

Astrological compatibility is also sought for and acquired between the girl and her prospective mother-in-law. The results are taken especially seriously if they will be living in the same home, because in this case the bride will be under the guidance of the mother-in-law and may spend more time with her than with her own husband. In marrying the son, she becomes the daughter of his mother.

Once a potential spouse is selected, discreet, informal inquiries are made by a relative or friend. If the response is encouraging, the girl's father meets with and presents a proposal to the boy's father. In some communities it is the boy's father who presents the proposal. In these modern times, with the worldwide diaspora of Hindus from India and other countries, the fathers must take an aggressive role in helping their sons and daughters become well

settled in life. If fathers do not fulfill this obligation, it becomes the duty of the mothers. This pattern differs from the tradition of well-settled village communities where only the father of the girl makes the overtures. In today's widely dispersed global Hindu village, it becomes everyone's duty to help in the task of matchmaking for the next generation.

Once the union has been tentatively agreed upon, the families gather at the girl's home to get further acquainted and allow them to meet and discuss their potential life together. Of course, mutual attraction and full consent of the couple are crucial. After all the input from the community is in place, it is the couple themselves who must make the final decision whether to spend their life together, based on their own personal sensibilities and judgments. They do have the right to say no. In recent years, we have found that an excellent way for a young prospective couple to gradually get to know each other before committing to marriage is through correspondence by e-mail over a period of several months. The first and the last important factor for a good match is that the boy and girl must be happy and comfortable in each other's company.

Pledges and Blessings

Love marriages that are not arranged by the parents are also fully acceptable if the astrology is excellent, the parents on both sides agree

Siva's followers arrange the marriages of their children, seeking sameness of lineage, astrological compatibility, harmony of the two families, total consent of both boy and girl and, foremost, their satguru's blessings.



and the young lady and the young man are of the same religious denomination. Of course, these ideals cannot always be met, and if not, more support will be needed from family and friends to make the marriage a success.

Before the wedding, the bride and groom each writes out a covenant by hand, pledging loyalty to one another and formalizing their promises, ideals, expectations and love. The couple share and discuss these documents together, read them carefully and make necessary revisions until 100 percent agreement is achieved. Like a ship's chart, these detailed vows can be referred to if the relationship gets off course. Each of the two families makes a written pledge as well, signed by the mother and father of the groom and the mother and father of the bride, stating what they promise to do and give toward supporting this marriage in the areas of *artha*, kama, dharma and moksha. Also most welcome are written testimonies in support of the marriage from grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles and aunts, sisters and brothers, as well as from other members of the religious community. This is also a time when anyone among family and friends may, in deepest confidence, even anonymously, share with the family preceptor any obstacles to this marriage that should be known and understood. A full, honest disclosure of the boy's life and the girl's life, including sexual experiences, should be made to both families and to the *kulaguru*.

From the time of inquiry into a match, several months should be allowed for the jyotisha acharyas and shastris to assess compatibility. The whole process of arranging a proper match for a son or daughter often takes two or more years. There should never be a sense of urgency for this or any other lifetime commitment. As Jnanaguru Siva Yogaswami so wisely said, "No hurry. No worry. No sorry." Nor

No offering is complete without the wife's consent. The bride gently touches the arm of her groom as he offers ghee into the homa fire.

should the arrangements ever be forced on the boy or girl. They remain free to cancel the process at any time if the match does not seem suitable to them.

When all agreements have been reached, the boy's mother adorns her new daughter with a gold necklace. Generous gifts are exchanged between the members of both families to bind the two families together in love and loyalty. Rejoicing begins with the formal engagement party, when the boy and girl exchange gifts, such as engagement rings. Later, they read their pledges to each other in the presence of elders. All arrangements and ceremonies culminate on the wedding day, when members of both families join to wish the couple a righteous, prosperous, happy life leading to the ultimate goal of enlightenment. During weddings or related ceremonies, the vegetarian diet should in no way be compromised. Meat and other nonvegetarian foods should not be served, even to please guests of other religions or communities. All Hindus attending should be requested to dress in formal Hindu attire.

Supporting the Marriage

Once a marriage has occurred, both families are relied upon to hold it together through the years. It is the duty especially of the husband's parents to support and make the marriage work and to offer a home to their new daughter. But it is unacceptable in modern Hindu society, and especially in our fellowship, to follow the oppressive tradition in which the girl becomes the total charge of the boy's family

and is seldom allowed to see her family of birth. It is the duty of the bride's parents to monitor her protection and observe the couple's abilities to dwell in unity and concord, while allowing them freedom to work things out together in their new home.

If she is abused physically, they must open their doors to receive her back, to be sheltered, comforted and consoled. It then becomes their duty and that of all *shishyas* in the community to try to patch things up, restore harmony and obtain trustworthy promises from the husband that this will never happen again. The bride should receive no blame for her husband's violence, for it is he who has broken his promise to adore her and protect her from harm.

The blending of the two families as a one family gives both the son and daughter two families to support them in good times and bad. It is the responsibility of both families to work toward assuring an endearingly enduring marriage, as well as to guide the raising of the progeny, so that they may become good, productive, dharma-aware citizens, contributing to society at large. If the two families fail in this mutual effort, society fails.

To build solid marriages, some Hindu institutions provide a family evening for fellowship and discussion with a trained counselor. Once a year during the holy time of Pancha Ganapati, the couple take out their marriage agreement and together study where they have been lax or derelict. They trace back in their minds to incidents that are still vibrating as negative *samskaras*, and apologize humbly and seek forgiveness and total resolution. They renew their commitment to each other. This is a wonderful key for setting the tone for the coming year—of harmony and peace, which leads to abundance and happiness. We call this *anahata* yoga, cleansing the heart chakra.

Of the many gifts she receives from her husband, two are most significant for the bride: the ring and the chain. Both are symbols of commitment made for a lifetime together, even seven.

bringing up that true love for one another. It is the process of bringing up all those things that were not settled before going to sleep, to retrieve those seeds before they get ploughed under and produce another crop of sorrow in the coming years. It is bringing up little things that each one said or did that hurt the other and were not resolved. It is bringing up incidents of anger, any physical violence, which should never be but may have been. It is time to extend apologies, talk with your *kulaguru*, and make promises and New Year's resolutions to set the course of the future on the path of dharma, which is based on *ahimsa*.

Cross-National Marriages

Many are the cross-national marriages happening today, marriages between members of different nations, religions, cultures or races. Times have changed. It is communication that has done it. With no communication, there is no change. When information flows freely, independent thinking is the result, and change is inevitable. Yes, inevitable, and that is what we are seeing today. The younger generation are thinking for themselves, no longer relying on elders to advise. This is unfortunate, for now they will have to learn from their own mistakes. What a way to learn! But this is what is happening, and it is happening faster than we would like to see. Much faster.

Any kind of marriage can survive if true love is there as its glue. True love is the kind of love that gives the couple the ability to give and take from each other without serious conflict, to go through the ups and downs together in trust, to support each other without fail and to reign as benign king and queen strong enough to bind all members of the family together. Even the *rishis* said that when true love is there, any kind of astrology is good and the marriage will be lasting. Love overrides all bad influences and softens incompatibilities. Love is the sum of the law. But how would a young couple know if theirs is true love or magnetic love? By giving the love a test. That

is how. Test it with time. Magnetic love weakens and all but disappears over time. True love grows stronger, much stronger, with time. True love mellows through the years.

Cross-national marriages are essential to the Hindu thought that *avant-garde* thinkers are sharing today, "All the world is one family," *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. Citizens of the world bound in love can survive the torrents of the upheavals that naturally come as lives are lived through together and individuals grow ever closer and closer in body, mind and spirit.

Every marriage needs a support of some kind or another built into it. True love is the best support of all, but support from the parents on both sides is a necessary help, too, especially for couples who were drawn together only by magnetism. It is when the magnetic love fades away, and all that's left are the children, that support from parents and friends is essential for the marriage to last without violent outbursts of released stress which was once undying passion.

Shall we have a look into the future? Since cross-national marriages have happened, are happening, and will continue to happen, there must be some sensible way for them to happen without undue strain on the families of the couple. Wisdom is supposed to fix things, heal conditions and settle problems. But first we have to admit that there is a problem. And, yes, cross-national marriages are a problem to many people of the old school. The old school only became old just ten years ago. Before then it was a school sharing standards of how things should be to maintain a growing and stable society.

When It's Too Late to Say No

When an Asian girl marries a black boy, should she be banished from the kingdom? Yes, according to the old school, the old standard. No, according to the new school, the new standard. The banishment method of parental punishment is outdated and bizarre today.



Catch them young, they say! When they marry young and grow together, they stay good friends forever.

Today's girls think. They understand. They do not intend to be the ill-treated servants of the mother-in-law. The days of Cinderella have long since passed when the mean old stepmother made her cringe beneath her wrath. Boys, too, think for themselves. They read, they listen and evaluate. Theirs is an ever-changing world ahead. They are busy preparing for it. But then along comes love, of one kind or another, to complicate their lives.

When Karen falls in love with Shan and elopes to his country, go visit them and bring her home in your heart. "I love you, therefore, I love whom you love." That should be the attitude. When Kumar announces his undying love for Carmen, his lover

from Mexico, and informs you that her father has a place for him as senior partner in his business, accept it. Enjoy Mexico City. It is a great place, because Kumar and Carmen are there.

Yes, hands across the ocean are loving hands. Hands across the ocean are binding continents to continents, businesses to businesses. This and more is what all Hindu elders are seeing happening around them today. Today's world is a happening world. Cross-national marriages are inevitable as the peoples of the world become more and more a global village. This is the real, earthy expression of our belief in one God and one world. The soul has nothing to do with nationalism, social restrictions, ethnic taboos or restrictive, prejudicial upbringing. Two souls joining in dharmic matrimony transcend all such boundaries.

My advice has always been that families should arrange marriages for their children. That's part of their *purusha* and *stri* dharma. This is a process they should begin early on. But if they don't do that, obviously their young people will start arranging their own marriages.

Eight Points of Traditional Matchmaking

WE BRIEFLY EXPLORE THE VENERABLE HINDU SYSTEM BY which parents find a suitable partner for their eligible boy or girl, taking into account family backgrounds, personal characteristics, astrological compatibility and mutual consent of the couple-to-be. Until the last few centuries, marriages in all human cultures were arranged. Kindred were closer, and in very real ways a new bride or groom became daughter and son, joining the extended family. Such arrangement provide community stability and strength, and a wisdom derived from making this crucial decision based on life-long knowledge of the couple.

According to the 2,400-year-old Hindu law book, *Artha Shastra*, "Any kind of marriage is approvable, provided it pleases all those that are concerned in it." Of the eight forms described in this and the other ancient law books, the first four—*brahma*, *daiva*, *arsha* and *prajapatya*—involve some form of arrangement, without dowry, between the parents of the boy and girl. These four are termed

prashasta or "commendable." The *brahma* form is the free giving of a girl "well adorned" with jewelry and clothes to a boy of good character. The *daiva* form is the bestowal of a girl to the officiating priest at a sacred ceremony; the *arsha* form is bequeathing of the girl signified by the auspicious gifting of two cows to her family. In the *prajapatya* form the bride is given with the condition that the couple perform their religious duties together. The remaining, *aprassasta* or "not praised," forms are: *asura*, the giving of a maiden in return for payment from the suitor; *gandharva*, the voluntary union of a couple arising from passion; *rakshasha*, the forcible abduction of a maiden; and *paichacha*, the stealing of a girl when she is drugged or asleep.

Hindu law accepts the *gandharva* marriage, condemns the *asura* and *paichacha* forms and limits the *rakshasha* to the warrior caste, Lord Krishna's abduction of Rukmini being a famous example. However, any marriage can be legitimized upon the consent of the girl and her parents.



And very often when they do arrange a marriage for themselves, the family objects. They have no right to object, because they didn't perform their duty in the first place.

The dilemma is that matches are not being arranged, and yet parents also want strict control over their youth, and youths are going to find partners, one way or another. Girls especially should be chaperoned. It's very easy in today's world to meet the wrong kind of people. As one solution, though not the ideal, I recommend in such cases that mature young ladies double-date and chaperone each other. Then they can talk together about the young men they are dating, and bypass the families who've neglected their duties, and arrange a good marriage for themselves that will be lasting, and in the future raise the next generation by doing their duty by arranging a marriage according to tradition for their own children early on.

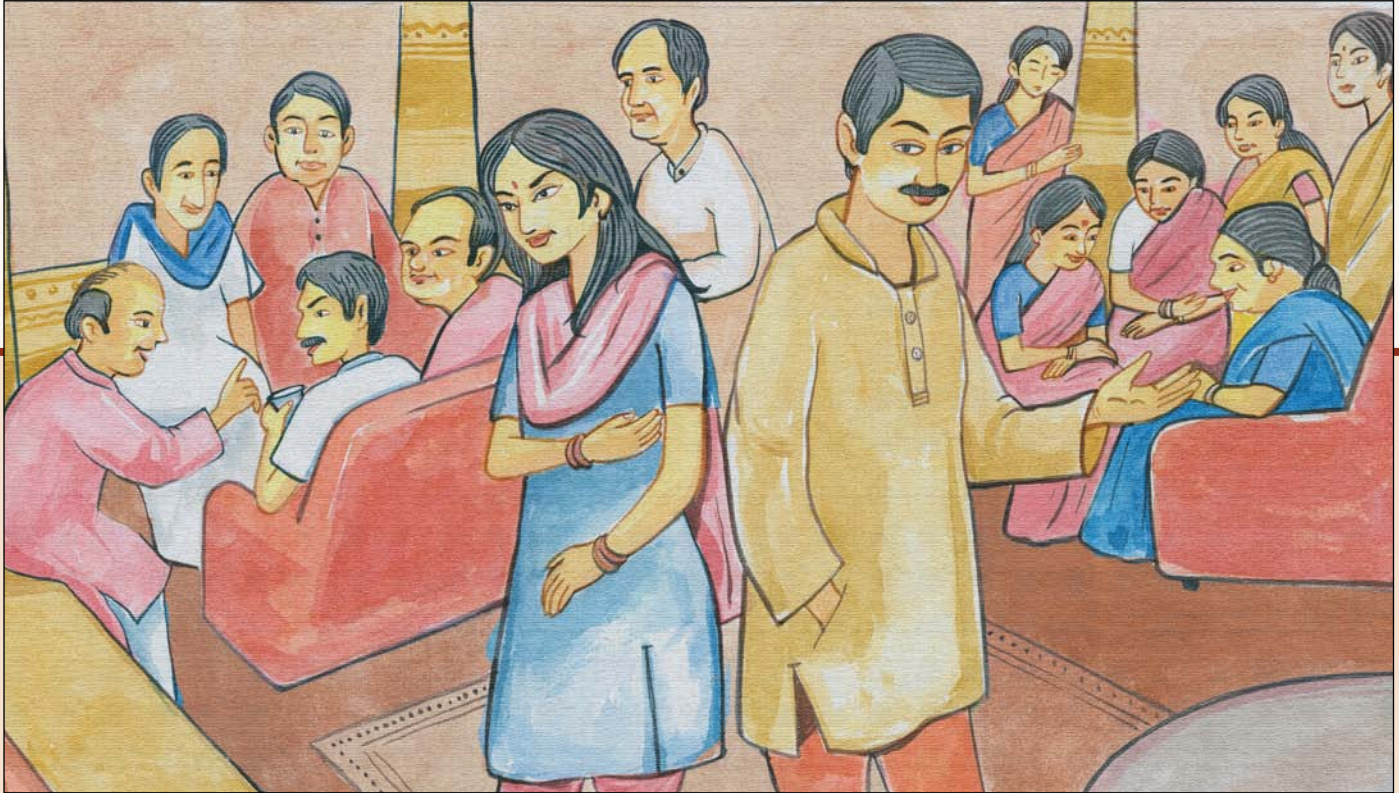
We cannot stand in front of progress, lest we get run over by it. But we can sit by the side of progress and guide it so it doesn't run off the track. This cannot be done when we break off communications and refuse to talk to the youth when they don't obey the old standard. It is communication that is catalyzing the changes in the

first place, so we all must guide the young by keeping the channels of communication open. Don't let them go. Go with them. Love them and gently guide them.

Interfaith Marriages

I tell young ladies, if you are planning on getting married, do not do what the average mother might tell you, "Get the husband under your thumb right at the beginning. Otherwise you might have a terrible time, because it's harder to do it later on." Don't do that. Go into your marriage for better or for worse and live up to your vow. Be to your husband like melted butter is on toast; it is absorbed. Be one. You will have a very happy old age.

It might be rough at the start, but don't hold divorce over his head to force him into various preconceived ideas that your girlfriend has put into your mind, as so many do, or that you've seen on television or in the movies. You have seen the results that Hollywood marriages have played upon the lives of those who have had them as they have gotten older through the years. They are not happy people, though they are advertised as glamorously as they make their living,



RAJEEV N.T.

1. How It Begins

Upon the boy's completion of education and beginning of gainful employment his parents proceed in earnest to find him a bride. As with most of the customs regarding arranged marriage, this practice remains virtually unchanged from Vedic times, when the boy was married at age 24 upon conclusion of the *brahmacharya ashrama*, or period of studentship. The girl is expected to be three or four years younger than the boy, due to the girl's faster maturity. Ideally girls are married between 17 and 21, boys from 21 to 28—older being less of a problem for a boy than a girl. The "word" is put out through friends, relatives and most recently

At a common function, elders in the family discuss and debate possibilities for their children. A young girl and a slightly older boy stand aside, conscious they are being talked about.

matrimonial ads. Also the children may be asked if they already have someone in mind. Sometimes a match is found very quickly, in just a week or two. In other cases it may take six months to a year to locate a suitable prospect. A go-between (termed *aryaman* in ancient times) is essential to the process. He may be an uncle, other close male relative or, in some areas, the village barber. The men make the contacts, but they do nothing without full consultation and agreement from the women of the family. Once the go-between has determined both families are favorably disposed to a match, a formal preliminary proposal is made by the girl's father to the boy's father.

That is not the way. The way is, when you take your vow, think about it first, and then stick to it for better or for worse.

I tell young men, "Gentlemen, if you are thinking about getting married, do not marry a young lady who won't be one with you in your religion, who will not be willing to stay at home and take care of and raise your family, one who doesn't respect you as a man and starts, right off the bat, by telling you what to do. Don't do that, because if you do you will be miserable and you will lose your manhood and be nothing but a puppet on the strings of your wife. And you will both be unhappy, but she especially, in older age. Rather, choose a girl who will blend with you for better or for worse. And whether you are successful or not, she will be happy to eat what you eat and go where you go. A Roman ideal pronounced by the bride at weddings was 'Where you are, there I will be.' It might be difficult in the beginning years, but it will be much better later."

A seeker wrote to me saying, "I'm in love with a Christian girl but she wants me to give up my religion and accept Jesus Christ. How can I explain to her that Hinduism is my path and I want to stay with it, but I love her very much? What should I do, Gurudeva?" I responded that you have to think of the children and how you want to raise them. Obviously you want to raise them to be good Hindu children. Since there is very little connection between Hinduism and Christianity—because Christianity does not accept karma or reincarnation, the existence of an all-pervasive God



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Warmth and security are two gifts the young couple offer to each other, each in their own way. He is strong and paves the way, while she gently supports and suggests.

or our temples and ceremonies—there will be serious problems. If she remains a Christian and you remain a Hindu, the children are going to be very confused. If your beloved doesn't want to go along with you intellectually and spiritually, maybe your love is only physical; that is called carnal love—love of the flesh. That is a very limited type of love, and it is not long lasting. Don't be guided by your carnal, instinctive emotions. Be guided by your spiritual intellect, or by my good advice. Go shopping. Find a good Hindu girl, or let your parents find one for you, so you can raise a good new generation of high souls.

I've seen many cases of Hindus marrying outside of their own religion, and I've seen the young couple be very happy for a

while. But after the children come and the sensuality of the marriage has cooled off, then there arises a tension between the husband and wife. Generally one becomes more religious than the other. The non-Hindu spouse argues, "You should be religious in my religion," and the Hindu insists, "You should be religious in my religion." The victims of this conflict, which generally goes on throughout life, are the children. It is a couple's shared allegiance to a religious tradition that is the most important common ground.

2. Family Background

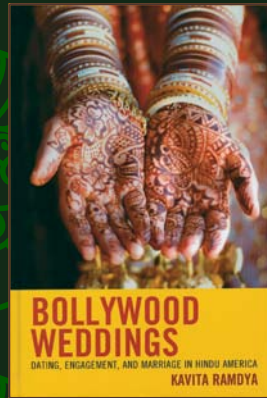
Hindu marriage joins not only two individuals, but two entire extended families, numbering dozens, even hundreds, of people. The reputation, learning, religious life and allegiance, health, personal traits, refinement and customs of those families contribute to the potential success of a marriage as much or more so than the individual qualities of the boy and girl. What is sought for is sameness of family background and economic and social status so that when the girl joins the boy's family, she does not enter a home greatly different from her own. Non-smoking, non-drinking and vegetarianism may be essential, required conditions. The matchmaking investigation is done openly by talking with friends, relatives and fellow employees of the concerned families, all of whom readily share information. In the present day, sameness of family often still means marrying within one's caste. But the mixed nature of modern society have the effect that caste does not insure the similarity of background it once

The father brings to the table all that he has gleaned about the boy's family from his friends. The mother adds what she has learned from her circle and voices her concerns on a point or two.

did, particularly if the boy is raised in one country and the girl in another. A mandatory check of family lineage guarantees observance of the often complex local customs regarding degrees of permissible blood relationship.



RAJEEV N.T.



Contemporary Adaptations

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Bollywood Weddings
Dating, Engagement and
Marriage in Hindu America
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Bollywood Weddings, excerpts from Kavita Ramdya's Insightful New Book

SIXTY PERCENT OF ASIAN INDIAN ADULTS IN THE UNITED States are married. The specific phenomenon I am interested in examining is how middle to upper class Indian-American Hindu men and women negotiate the Hindu wedding ritual, including the marriage decision process. This book begins with the second generation's process of finding a spouse. It moves through the engagement process, and concludes on the wedding day. Although the focus here is negotiating engagement and marriage, I am interested more broadly in the negotiation of culture. Whereas originally I situated second-generation Indian-American

Hindus between two antithetical philosophies—that of prototypical mainstream middle-class America and traditional India—my research repeatedly frustrated this worthy assumption, prompting me to extend and complicate my thesis to include modern-day Bollywood as a prominent mediating source of culture informing second-generation Indian-American Hindus on their wedding day.

Not two but three cultures are operating in the lives of second-generation Indian-American Hindus when they are planning their weddings: 1) a traditional India which in some respects no longer exists in the most pluralistic country in the world but which has a

presence in the immigrant and second generation's memories and sense of history, 2) mainstream middle-to-upper class America as described in wedding planning magazines such as *Modern Bride* and websites such as theknot.com, 3) and Bollywood India as instantiated by wedding-planning magazines such as *Bibi* and websites such as benzerworld.com.

Weddings are a window into seeing how second-generation Indian-American Hindus construct India and America. Weddings reveal conflicts and choices. Finally, weddings matter, not only for the bride and groom. Weddings are rites of passage where intergenerational and cross-cultural tensions play out and, in the case of Indian-American Hindus, convey a sense of compromise between multiple cultures.

A Match that Was Not to Be: Rati and Paul

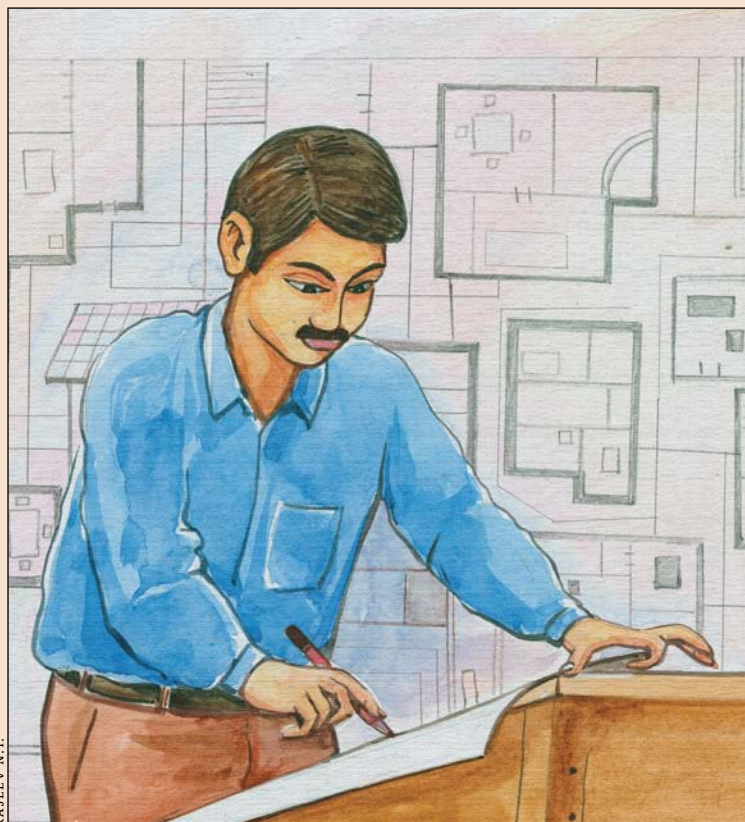
For Rati, a defining moment in her search for an Indian-American Hindu husband was when her white boyfriend accused her of "being racist." Rati had just returned from her first trip to India since she was a child. She stayed in the houses of various relatives, family with whom she "picked up from when we last met without skipping a beat." Often she was meeting extended family for the first time and was impressed by the open-armed welcomes. Upon returning from her trip to her home in New York, Rati's interests in Indian culture reignited. She revived her love for vegetarian dishes and began taking yoga. Along with continuing her *bharatanatyam* (classical Indian dance) classes and watching Bollywood films, she began attending the local temple with some international Indian students she met at the local art theater's showing of *Lagan*, a popular Bollywood film. Paul, Rati's boyfriend at the time, quietly grew more and more impatient with Rati's love for anything Indian and finally burst out in frustration when he saw her zealotry showed no signs of subsiding. Boarding a local train a few moments before the departure time,

Rati made a motion to sit next to an Indian male passenger before Paul intercepted and took the last empty seat himself. Rati was left to stand, but she caught Paul's look of self-satisfied smugness at having successfully kept Rati from making another Indian acquaintance, a man who might serve as a further threat to their relationship.

Later, when Rati confronted Paul about his sneakiness as well as his lack of confidence in their relationship, Paul admitted that after dating her he "could never date another Asian again" for fear that he would not be taken seriously since he was not Asian. When pressed further, Paul accused Rati of preferring Indians to whites and of "being a racist." Rati's anecdote about dating Paul, a white man, is interesting because it highlights the second generation's enthusiasm for and the significance they place on "being Indian" and relying on activities like practicing yoga to express Indianness. Watching Bollywood movies, eating vegetarian, practicing yoga, learning Indian classical dance and other activities are significant in describing the second generation's understanding of India, their own ethnic-American identity and the characteristics they seek in a marriage partner. After the incident described above, Rati dumped Paul and relinquished the American notion of falling in love and pursuing a "love marriage." Shortly thereafter, she posted an online matrimonial ad in shaadi.com. Therein began her adventures and misadventures that would eventually lead her to meet and marry her Indian-American husband, Shiv.

Arranged Meetings: a Third Paradigm

For second-generation Indian-American Hindus, there are two models for marriage: the arranged marriage and the love marriage. These models are diametrically opposed. The love marriage usually involves a whimsical and incidental meeting followed by months and often years of dating. The arranged marriage excludes dating altogether and in fact rarely allows for more than one meeting before



3. The Boy's Character

The girl's parents regard the boy's education and earning ability to be of vital importance, for these make likely his long-term financial stability. It is also highly desirable that he already be employed. Once satisfied with the boy's ability to adequately provide for a family, his personal character reputation among friends, relatives and teachers is carefully looked into. Male relatives of the girl will talk with this group of people, inquiring in some detail about the boy, his personal habits, religiousness, reliability and how he behaves with regard to girls. If the boy lives in a Western country, this latter issue would be investigated quite carefully. Health is very important. There should be no indication of mental retardation, schizophrenia, or disease such as TB. Drinking or smoking can be a very negative attribute. Physique is only critically important in that the boy must be taller than the girl; otherwise it is a useful but not determining factor. Parents will also look closely at the boy's father and grandfather, on the assumption that the boy will develop the same good (or bad) qualities. Similarity of boy and girl is the goal. For example, parents would not marry a refined girl to a boy who is crude or uneducated, even if well-employed.

.....
While his family structure may be readily apparent, the boy's individual achievements and qualities come under the microscope. His current career position offers a glimpse into his capabilities and potential.

4. The Girl's Qualities

Apppearance, personal character and homemaking ability are generally foremost in the consideration of the girl. She should be shorter than the boy, have a pleasant walk, a feminine voice, modesty and good health. Her potential as a future wife is judged by observing her mother, grandmother and sisters. And, like the boy, inquiry regarding her character and temperament is made among her relatives, friends, teachers and fellow students. Her religious inclinations (even more so than the boy's) and education are important. Some skill in music or dance is a plus, but extensive stage performance or involvement in sports is traditionally frowned upon. Since having children is a primary purpose of Hindu married life, the desirable girl comes from a large family—an indication that she herself will have many children. A girl from a small family—especially an only child, or one without a brother, is at a disadvantage. In recent decades the girl's ability to hold a job and earn money have become a paramount consideration for some, even above religious, cultural and child-rearing considerations. The trend may be related to the demands for dowry in which the boy's family approaches the marriage with financial gain in mind, as well as to pressing economic conditions.

.....
Music and dance, art and handicraft are indicative of a girl's training and skills, molding, rearranging and working with herself, abilities she will use as she moves in with a new family and makes it her very own.



the wedding day.

So, how do second-generation Indian-American Hindus negotiate these two opposed models of marriage? How do they reconcile love marriage with arranged marriage? "Arranged meetings" is an already negotiated and well-established third model for marrying among second-generation Indian-American Hindus. The second generation uses this method to filter out prospective marital candidates who do not have the "right" ethnic, religious, linguistic and regional traits desired by their parents. For example, a family active in the Gujarati Hindu community can seek only fellow Gujarati Hindus to introduce to the eligible son or daughter. Any marital candidate left standing is fair game for something akin to dating. The second generation feels free to determine whether the meaningful candidates have sexual chemistry and compatible personalities, characteristically American criteria contemplated in making a "love marriage" decision.

In this way, neither arranged nor love marriage are excluded, and the needs and desires of both generations are respected. The first generation is still involved in finding a suitable partner for their child, whether through introductions by family and friends, or placing an

ad online or in a newspaper. Additionally, candidates who do not come from the same religious sect, speak the desired dialect, or originate from the same region of India (and thus possibly eat dissimilar food), are cast away before a set of eligible prospects are considered. Then second-generation Americans embark in all the activities associated with pursuing an American "love marriage." They date for months and sometimes even years, determining whether she and her partner share common likes and dislikes. They also determine, and not just by holding hands, whether there is enough sexual attraction to keep their mutual attentions "til death do we part."

Along with their immigrant parents, most of the second-generation Indian-American Hindus I met prefer to marry a partner of Indian heritage and Hindu faith because marriage is seen as a definitive way for the second generation to express its identity as ethnic and religious Americans. They are American, yes. But they are also Indian and Hindu. Additionally, pleasing the first generation's wish to see their children marry a Hindu Indian is itself an expression of ethnicity, of one's Indianness, in this case with respect for the traditional value of deference to one's elders.

Ethnic Capital

This idea provides additional ammunition against the "melting pot" metaphor. Within the second-generation Indian-American Hindu ethnic minority, men and women of marriageable age who have high economic and social standing prefer to marry within their community rather than engage in an exogenous marriage. Rather than participate in a "melting pot" as early ethnic scholars described the trajectory of ethnic Americans, participants chose to marry people from within their community despite the New York area's diverse population.

Rather than debating values and characteristics second-generation Indian-American Hindus should seek in a partner, the first and

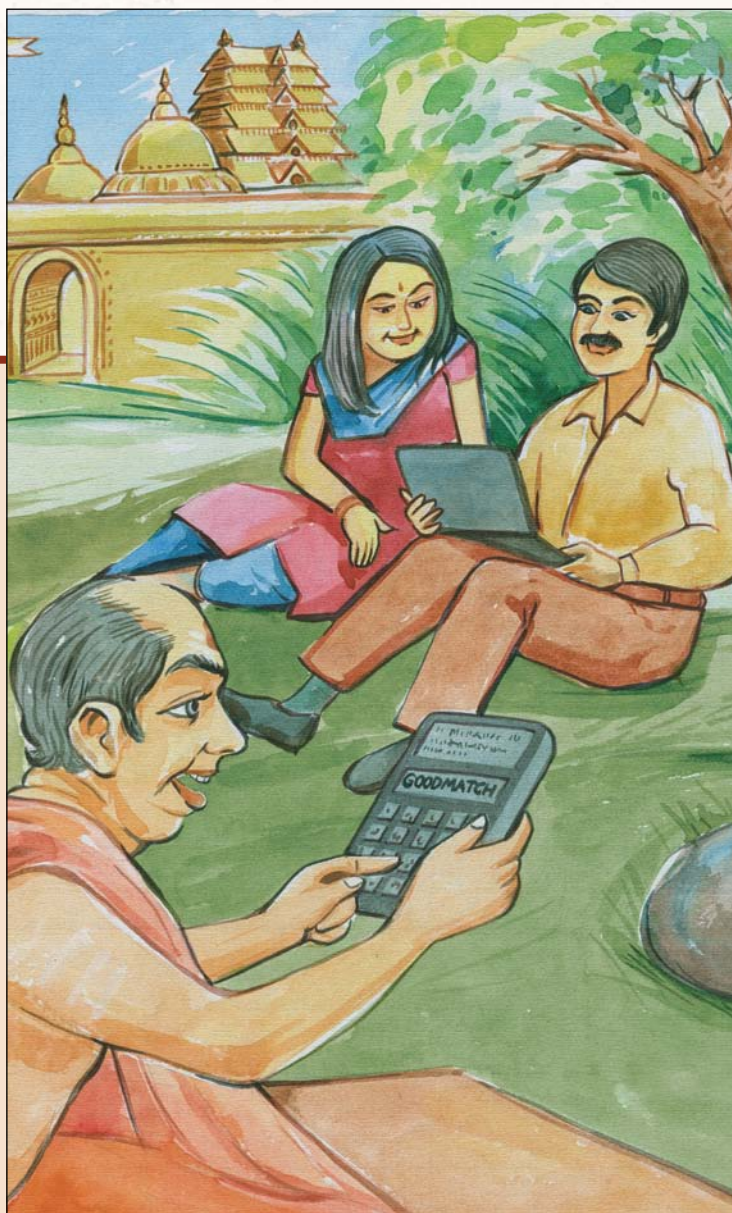
second generations have already negotiated a compromise whereby the second generation engages in various methods for meeting a partner that meet all or most of the immigrant generation's religious, ethnic, regional, and linguistic cultural criteria. At the same time, the prospects who make it through this sieve of criteria are then free to engage in dating relationships that look typically American. For instance, Shiv and Rati were attracted to each other's profiles because they shared the same regional and religious Indian identity; however, they dated for two years before marrying. Their mutual love for Indian performance was what bonded them together in terms of sharing common interests.

The Indian-Hindu community has evolved enough in the last forty years that mechanisms are already in place for the second generation to search for potential marriage partners. These mechanisms respect both traditional Indian as well as modern American criteria. "Arranged meetings" provide a group of candidates acceptable for a member of the second generation to fall in love with after having satisfied the first generation's ethnic and religious requirements.

Second-generation Indian-American Hindus seek marriage

partners who have what I describe as "symbolic ethnic capital." This finding sheds light on how the second generation envisions and understands Hindu India. The men and women in my study scrutinize characteristics in the opposite sex in order to confirm if that marital prospect is "Indian" enough for marriage. Like Rati obsessed over getting better-acquainted with her Indian heritage through practicing yoga, learning Indian classical dance, and watching Bollywood movies, other participants used similar activities as markers for Indian ethnicity among marriage prospects. Being ethnically Indian and from a Hindu family was often not enough. Especially "expressive" Indian-American Hindus desired a marriage partner who could further confirm their identity as Indian-American Hindus.

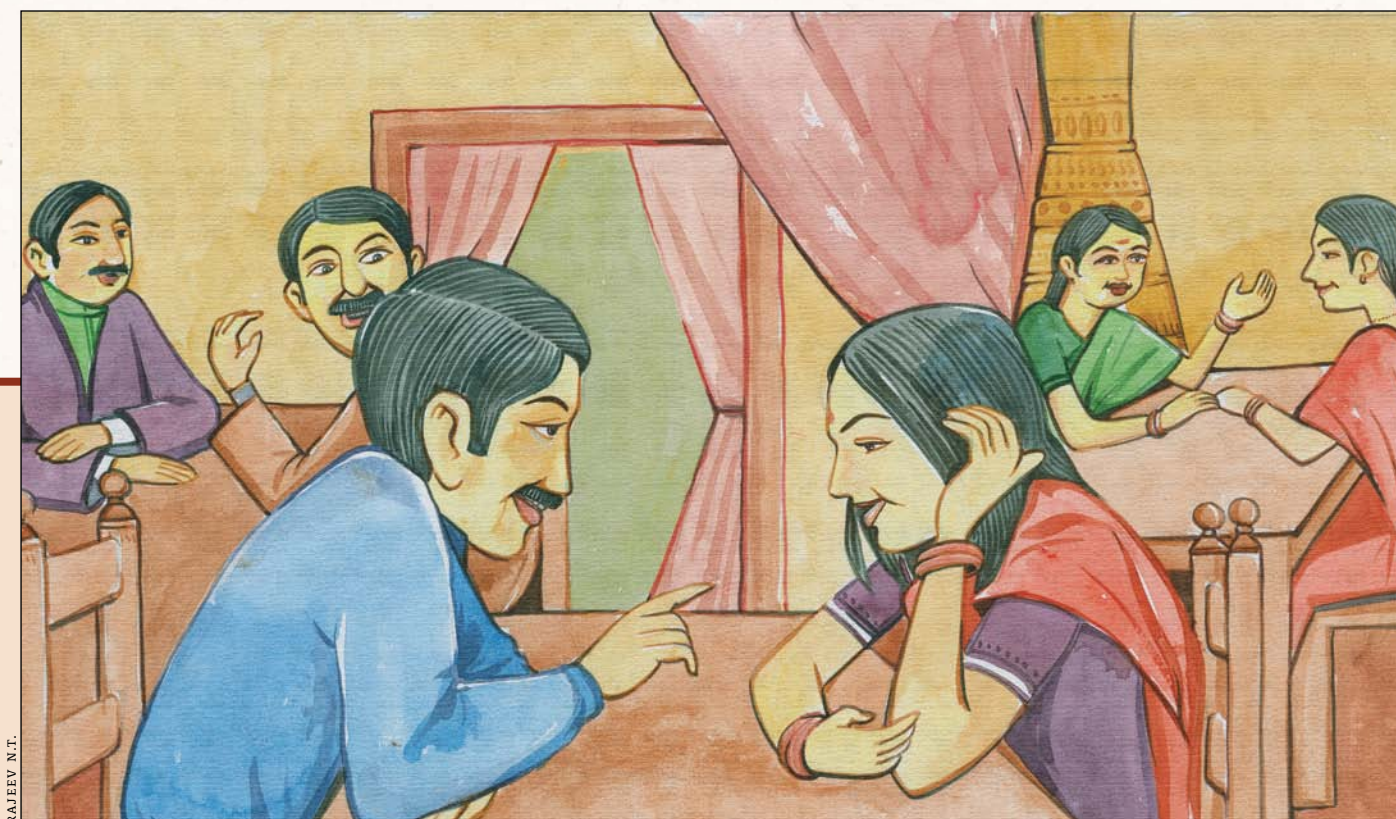
A number of factors are important in the Indian-Hindu American community when it comes to finding a mate in a limited and dispersed pool of partners. Processes such as placing matrimonial ads in ethnic newspapers and online allow second-generation Indian-American Hindus to meet fellow Americans as well as Indian Hindus in England, Canada, India and Singapore. These mechanisms are important because they allow second-generation Indian-American



5. Verifying Compatibility

deally the complete charts of the boy and girl will be calculated and analyzed by a competent astrologer. There is also a simplified system of ten tests based on a comparison of the boy's and girl's *nakshatras* (birth stars) and *rasis* (moon signs) used in the absence of a complete comparison to diagnose the physical, mental and emotional compatibility of the couple, plus future health, number of children, financial success and longevity. Customarily the astrology is examined early on in the evaluation of a match. The preliminary tests of *rajju*, *vedhai* and what is known as "Mars affliction" identify a few (about 20%) very inauspicious combinations which predict great misfortune in marriage, or divorce. The second eight tests are allotted one to eight points each, for a total of 36. A happy and lasting marriage usually requires a score of more than 18 points. For example, the test of *nadi*, given 8 points, predicts emotional intimacy or lack thereof; that of *yoni*, given 4 points, indicates physical compatibility, marital harmony, faithfulness and children. Astrology is a good but not perfect predictor of marital success. The great Hindu astrologer Rishi Kalidasa advised, "Even if by these matchings the girl gets more than 20 marks, if the boy does not really love the girl, a marriage will be futile."

Astrologers match and calculate based on ten points. Modern couples may choose to use websites that offer the same service, some for free! Having a skilled, experienced and patient astrologer is key.



6. Introducing the Couple

A potential match? Content with all requirements, the parents arrange a venue for the boy and girl to meet and talk.

The couple meets only when there is a favorable outcome to the investigation of each family, the astrological compatibility, the characteristics of the boy and girl and the preliminary meetings of the parents. In previous times, and still in some areas, the girl would be secretly pointed out to the boy and his family at a public event such as a temple puja. Today a preliminary exchange of photographs largely replaces this custom, which prevented a girl from being faced with a number of outright rejections. Usually the boy and his family will go to the girl's home for their first meeting. The parents will sit and talk, and the girl—who may be aware but is not

told of the purpose—will be asked to come in and serve tea to the "guests." How she reacts to requests, her dress, appearance, speech, behavior toward her parents, brothers and sister and rapport with young children are all noted by the boy and his family. After she leaves the room, the boy states if he has a favorable impression. If so, the girl is asked privately about the boy. If both are agreeable, they talk privately together, perhaps walking in the garden for an hour with young children as escorts. Sometimes more meetings are held. A final decision is then made requiring agreement of six people—the four parents, the boy and the girl.

Hindus to meet partners that satisfy the first generation's religious and ethnic criteria as well as the community's desire to find a partner with symbolic ethnic Indian and America capital.

Finding a potential partner through newspaper and on-line matrimonial ads was followed by typically American patterns of dating which included a long courtship designed to ferret out similar hobbies and the quality of sexual chemistry. By meeting a potential spouse through a family network or other family sanctioned modes of pursuing marriage, such as online matrimonials, second-generation Indian-American Hindus accrued symbolic ethnic Indian capital they later spent when in long-term relationships and premarital sex. Mainstream American dating was encouraged by my participants' immigrant parents to ensure that romance and love, two values that express Americanness, were as much a part of their children's decision to marry as religious compatibility and regional identity.

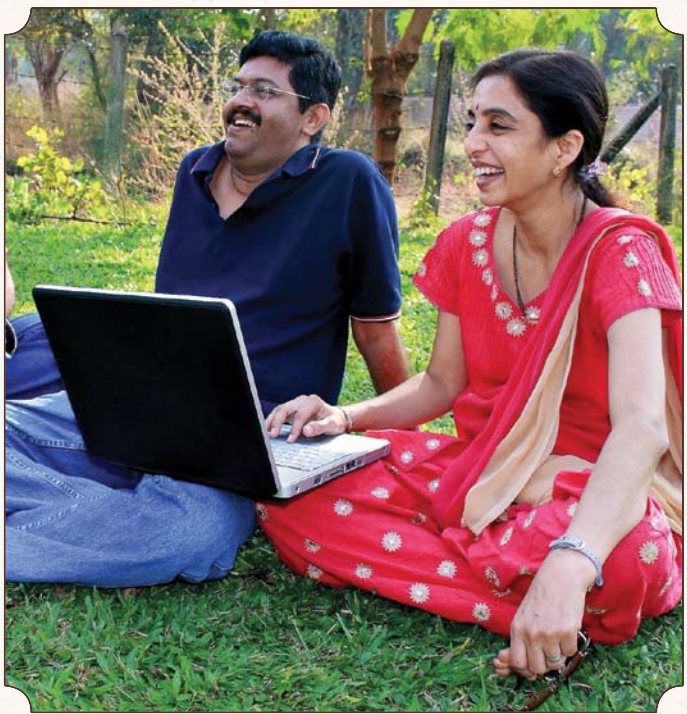
Rati and Shiv Meet through Shaadi.com

Rati, whose mother is a white Lutheran woman from Canada and whose father is a Hindu raised in Uttar Pradesh, India, literally chose to "be Indian." The story of how Rati decided to utilize shaadi.com—an on-line Internet matrimonial website popular among

South-Asian Hindus—supports my notion that, for second-generation Indian-American Hindus interested in expressing their ethnic-American identity, marrying a fellow Indian-ethnic Hindu is the most effective way. Coming from a bi-cultural family, Rati was not exposed to Indian-Hindu culture until her twenties, when she made conscious efforts to adopt Indian-Hindu religion and customs. Rati is both a career-minded professional dancer and an Indian-American woman seeking to establish a family to uphold the Indian and American sides of her identity. Rati reports that her parents' attitude was: "When you want [religion] in your life, you'll go find what works for you."

As if applying for a job, Shiv, Rati's future husband, sent a competitive biodata, or resume, to Rati in response to her picture and profile on shaadi.com. After first talking on the phone for three and a half hours, Rati and Shiv began having regular phone conversations before she visited him in New York. After her first visit, they began seeing each other every other weekend for three months before getting engaged.

Rati describes meeting Shiv on the matrimonial website as making their relationship more honest and open than if they had met in a bar or through a friend. She tells me how "all the questions you want to ask on the first date" about marriage, family, education, and



salaries "you can't ask" when meeting through conventional methods but that by the time six months roll by and "you've figured out what a guy is all about, that's six months of your life wasted." As she puts it, "On shaadi.com no one is there for a booty call. No one wants to date for fun or pass time." Plus, all the uncomfortable questions regarding money and salaries are already answered in the bio-data, leaving the boy and girl more time and energy to focus on discovering whether the two have chemistry and are compatible for marriage. Rati and Shiv's families were from the same region in India and belonged to the same caste, two criteria that led Shiv to Rati's advertisement through the click of a few scroll-down menus. Having

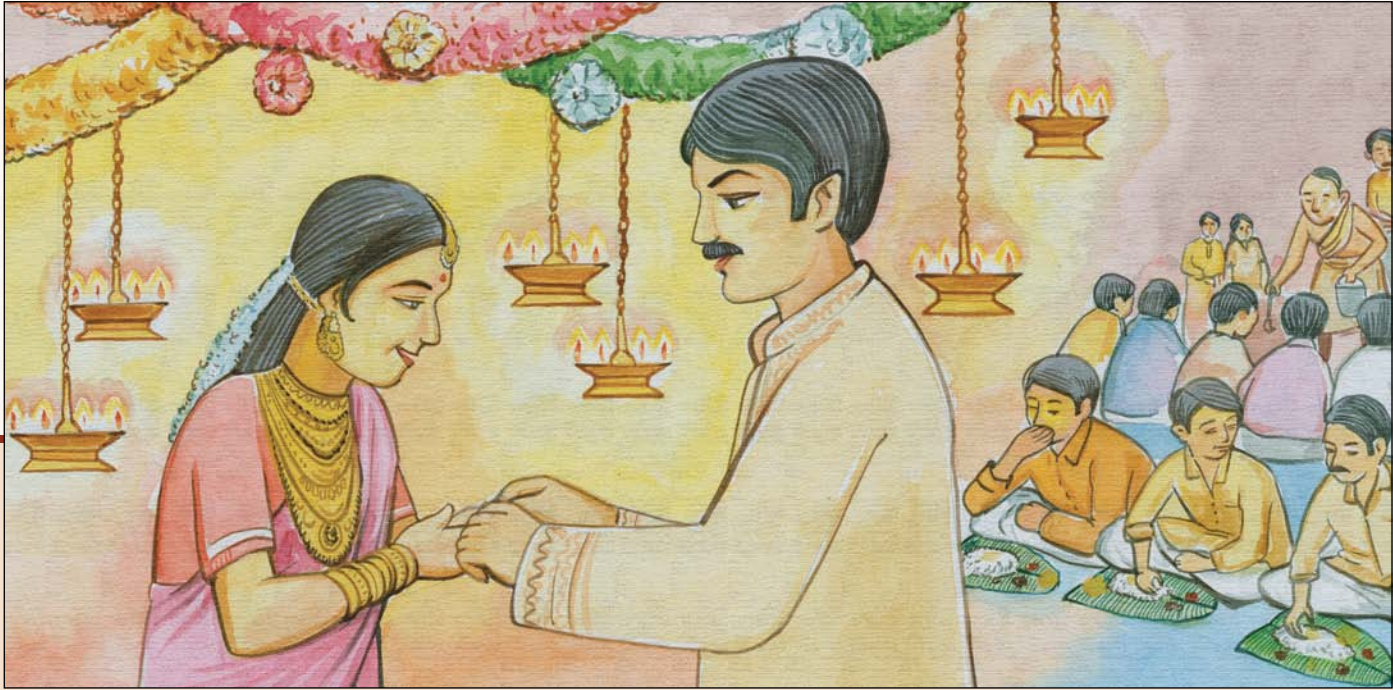
Whether their meeting is arranged or by choice, a couple needs time to spend time together to understand each other well. While traditionally such meetings are chaperoned by an elder, and touching is taboo, a couple deciding on their own are more liberal.

pre-determined that they were compatible in terms of region and caste, the two were free to pursue an American-style romance. But, as Rati describes it, "The elders could not have done a better job putting the two of us together." Rati engaged in two models of marriage, the arranged one as well as the love one, in her arranged meeting. Rather than reject either the traditional Indian or modern American models for marriage, she embraced elements from both traditions in choosing a spouse. It took her parents' divorce and her trip to India to move Rati to express her Indianness and thereby her Americanness. Rati claimed her Indian heritage upon returning from India and married Shiv to reinforce her ethnic-American identity.

Hamsa and Nalin

Whereas Shiv and Rati's courtship began with Shiv's response to Rati's online matrimonial advertisement, Hamsa and Nalin met through friends while students at the University of Wisconsin. Nonetheless, Hamsa and Nalin's story (like Shiv and Rati's) emphasizes the significance among second-generation Indian-American Hindus of finding not only a co-ethnic marriage partner but also a spouse who carries a certain level of knowledge of Indian culture and Hinduism.

In one photograph, Hamsa sits with her chin in one palm while



7. The Betrothal Ceremony

The betrothal is called *vagdana*, "word giving," a practice described in the *Vedas*. The boy's family is invited to the girl's house where the girl's father formally promises that his daughter will marry the boy. This promise is binding and very unlikely to be broken before the wedding. The oral promise is essential and standard throughout India, though specific betrothal customs vary considerably. Most, if not all, communities practice exchange of visits and gifts between the families as part of sealing the agreement. The gifts from the groom's family include clothing and cosmetics for the girl, while her family give clothing for the boy.

Other home observances include applying tilak to the boy, the

The betrothal is a mini-marriage. With most of the family and friends in attendance, rings are exchanged and the wedding date is set. A grand feast follows.

giving of a gold necklace to the girl by the boy's mother—often the necklace she received at her own betrothal—and/or the more modern exchange of rings. In some areas the womenfolk sing humorous songs. A formal religious ceremony (*kanyavarana*) may be conducted by priests, but often the whole matter is handled in an informal manner. In Sri Lanka, for example, frequently a civil wedding is held immediately upon the decision to marry, with the formal religious marriage taking place later. Commonly it is just a matter of weeks between the betrothal and the marriage, which is held at an astrologically auspicious day and time.

8. What About Dowry?

There is no Hindu scriptural or legal basis for the payment of dowry—that is, giving money to the boy's family to secure a marriage. It was unknown in early India and arose only in recent times. In the last few decades abuse has reached such proportions that newly married girls are even murdered in disputes over dowry! Marriage arranging has become for some a process of extortion from the girl's family.

The proper Hindu custom is *stridhana*, "women's wealth," by which an abundance of jewelry and gold is given to the girl at the time of her marriage. This is her personal wealth, intended to provide security in case her husband dies or abandons her, especially after her own father's death. Legally, it remains her personal property during the marriage and must be returned upon a divorce. A wealthy Hindu bride might possess a pound or more of gold. Also, she would bring to her new home everything needed for housekeeping. A related money issue is the expense of wedding festivities, which in India can run up to several years' salary of the bride's father. Lavish weddings are a worldwide custom, cutting across all religions and cultures, but reason should prevail in deciding how much to spend.



Jewelry and other gifts are exchanged and exhibited in an attempt to assure each other of their sound financial and social standing.

Nalin stands behind her hugging his hands around her neck. In another the two playfully hold hands and stand across from one another as if they are about to whirl in circles. Rather than look demure, as Indian tradition would dictate, Hamsa smiles like a love struck Bollywood actress and Nalin looks like a young Amitabh Bachan (one of Bollywood's most famous actors).

Hamsa is embarrassed when I comment on how much I enjoy looking at her wedding portraits. "Yes, well we did whatever our Indian wedding photographer told us," she says. "Those poses aren't natural to us, but they're typical Indian wedding poses." What intrigues me in my conversations with Hamsa and Nalin is their inability to distinguish modernized India from the India they have configured for themselves in their imaginations. To them, India is one homogenous country with one homogenous tradition. This confession is even more striking for me because Hamsa and Nalin are a regionally mixed couple. Nalin's family is from Gujarat in Western India, and Hamsa from Andhra Pradesh in South India, yet they consistently ignore the diversity of cultures within the country and remain ignorant that their own "traditional South Indian" wedding was a hybrid one.

Ironically, Hamsa and Nalin's "pure Indian-Hindu" wedding reveals how there is no pure "India." As the couple's wedding attests, India is made up of many different regional cultures and a myriad of religious faiths and languages.

Nalin was not the first Gujarati North Indian man Hamsa dated either. She tells me that although she had many friends in her ethnically diverse high school, she did not date until she arrived at college. "I had one two-month long relationship with a Gujarati Indian guy before I met Nalin," she tells me. But apparently he wasn't Indian enough: "He was very different from Nalin. My ex-boyfriend wasn't very knowledgeable of his background, and he didn't have an Indian community growing up in West Virginia; he wasn't familiar with the religion and didn't know the language. He'd never been to India. That's why I didn't connect with that guy. He was very apathetic about being Indian."

Knowing about India was something Hamsa actively looked for in a partner. Like Nalin, she wanted to find a partner she could love but who could also assert his "Indianness," thereby reinforcing her own symbolic ethnic Indian capital, and in the process her own Americanness. She wanted to marry a man knowledgeable of his Indian-Hindu background to reflect her own cultural and religious ties with India. While outsiders might posit that Hamsa's wish to exclusively date Indians depletes her American symbolic ethnic capital, I argue that it instead makes her more American.

Nalin reports he was very intentional about exclusively dating and marrying Indian women:

"From the very beginning I always knew I would meet all types of people, but in terms of marriage I wanted to marry someone with the same cultural values. It would be easier and we would get along better. Around high school I made that choice when I started seriously thinking about dating and figuring out what I was looking for."

When asked what values are specific to Indian Hindus, he



Indian Hindu youth may today balk at having their marriage arranged by their parents, but they do understand the need for "due diligence" in selecting a life-long partner and are not falling into the dubious Western pattern of marrying out of "love at first sight"

recognizes that values are found across cultures and re-formulates his thoughts. "It was more cultural, going to temple. Growing up, I think Indian culture brought about family closeness; family came first. In college I never thought about dating a non-Indian." When asked whether his parents were upset that he married a non-Gujarati girl, he responds, "In a perfect world I would have married a Gujarati girl, but they are educated enough to know that compatibility is more important."

During their two-year courtship at the University of Wisconsin, Hamsa and Nalin moved to San Diego for a summer where they interned and took classes. In San Diego, they tell me, they fell in love. "I didn't think I couldn't live without him," Hamsa tells me, "but I thought I would be sad if he ever left." Hamsa presses her two index fingers into her fluffy comforter and they travel, making an upside down V, until they meet at the same point. "That's how we were; we started off in different places and spent enough time together dating that we pulled each other in the same direction," she explains. For her, love for her husband was not love at first sight, but still conformed in a way to the traditional Indian view of love where one marries first and later grows to love one's spouse. For Hamsa, a couple dates and then grows to love one another.

We Just Clicked...



"Indian Love: We Just Clicked" by Rajini Vaidyanathan, Mumbai

IT ALL SEEMS SO EASY IN THE BOLLYWOOD FILMS. THE CHARACTERS fall in love at first sight, and despite some initial resistance from their family, it all ends happily ever after. The reality, of course, is very different. Sitting in a crowded cafe packed with young Mumbaiites, is Nik Talreja. He is, in many ways, the archetypal Bollywood hero: good looking and charming, but missing one thing—a woman by his side. Nik is just one of 15 million people in the country using the web to meet a life partner. Internet matrimonial sites are big business in India. The world's largest, shaadi.com, was created 13 years ago, and now boasts an extra 10,000 new users every day. In fact, a key distinction between Indian matrimonial sites and those in the West is that, in India, it is often the parents who are going online to find a match for their child.

"We give freedom to our own children, they are well educated, they are brought up in a good culture," says Arun Joshi, who is searching for a son-in-law. "The only thing we desire would be that they get married within a restricted caste and community," he adds. His 29-year-old daughter is too busy climbing up the career ladder to find herself a husband, so Mr. Joshi has decided to help things along by submitting a profile for her online.

In the tradition of arranged marriage, it is standard for parents and relatives to search for a match that meets a certain set of criteria. Those specifications can vary from family to family, but often include looking for someone from a similar caste, community, salary bracket and even skin color.

Off-Line Centers

Targeting parents appears to be a key strategy for the companies behind these sites. In recent years, there has been a rise in so-called "off-line centers" designed to bring Internet marriage to those who are rarely online. Resembling Internet cafes, with banks of computers lining the room, there are advisers on hand to help guide people through the process of creating a profile and selecting matches. For the young couples who place themselves on these sites, Internet matrimonials offer a choice which simply didn't exist before.

While there are many other happy stories of matches made in cyberspace, there are some people who question how progressive it is. "I don't think it's breaking down barriers, to tell you the truth," says Bandhana Tewari, the fashion feature editor of *Vogue, India*. For

Today's Hindu youth are seeking a perfect blend of the traditional and the modern. Culture is special to this young lady: she has adapted to technology and uses it wisely to pursue her dreams of a charmed life.

Bandhana, new technology is not changing the old values, where meeting a partner by caste and background is so important. Meanwhile, she predicts that it will be a long time before people use the Internet simply for dating, rather than searching for a specific type of marriage partner. "I don't think India has reached that level," she says. "They still will not give up their moral stand."

The Traditional Way

But Gaurav Rakshit from shaadi.com argues that these sites are breaking down social barriers. One example he cites is that more than half of the people using the site do not search for a match by caste—a sign, he argues, that things are changing. "If we found those numbers were trending the other way round, we would probably have to take a very hard call, saying that we're exacerbating such things. But right now we see them trending very nicely for us in the same way that India is evolving."

There are, of course, large parts of rural India where there is no Internet. But Mr Rakshit hopes to reach these parts as a long-term strategy. He claims one in ten of all registered marriages in India can be attributed to the Internet, but in five years' time he believes this number could rise to as many as one in two. But he might have a job on his hands.

In the village of Wana, a three-hour drive from Mumbai, where there is no Internet connection, Rathina Surjivadhi is celebrating the marriage of his daughter Anita. He found her husband Jagdish with the help of local matchmakers. He is yet to be convinced that the Internet way is better. "You need to make sure you don't ruin the girl's life," he says. "If they drink or have had affairs, the Internet can't tell you that kind of thing."

Source: BBC News, Mumbai: <http://bit.ly/bPYku4>
Published: 2010/03/10 © BBC

Why I Am a Believer: a Hindu's Answer

Dr. Arvind Sharma chooses to be, and remain, a Hindu because of three profound features of Hinduism—its subtlety, charity and civilizational creativity

This fascinating book, Why I Am a Believer, Personal Reflections on Nine World Religions, contains nine essays by articulate believers in the Buddhist, Jaina, Sikh, Dao, Jewish, Christian, Confucian, Muslim and Hindu faiths. The Hindu essay, by Dr. Arvind Sharma, who is also the book's editor, is remarkable for its concise intellectual formulation of Hinduism's ageless spiritual wisdom. He shows how Hinduism's implicit understandings about religion are becoming key propositions on the world stage as humanity searches for a way beyond fundamentalism to a new world of multi-faith, religious pluralism.

By ARVIND SHARMA, MONTREAL, CANADA

HINDUISM HAS THREE ALLURING DIMENSIONS that make me want to be a Hindu: subtlety, charity and civilizational creativity.

Subtlety

By subtlety, I mean Hinduism's capacity to draw and to hold on to subtle distinctions. Here are seven such distinctions for your consideration.

1. One such distinction is the distinction between emptiness and openness. We might indifferently describe a field as a vast open field or a vast empty field. But there is a difference. In fact, one could say that the goal of Hinduism is to convert an empty mind into an open mind. This is a delicate endeavor; how delicate may be seen in the West's attempt to do this in the form of the New Age movement. The mind tends to become so open, according to observers, that the brain almost falls out.

2. Another such distinction is between the absolute and the universal. I think Hinduism searches for the ultimate in metaphysics and for the universal in morality, in comparison to the West, which concludes only too often that it has found the ultimate in metaphysics, even as it formulates the absolute in morality.

I know these remarks are somewhat opaque. They could perhaps be elucidated by drawing a related distinction between ultimate and final. Something is ultimate when nothing lies beyond it, in the sense that nothing could possibly lie beyond it. Something is final, however, in the sense that it marks the final point within a given frame-

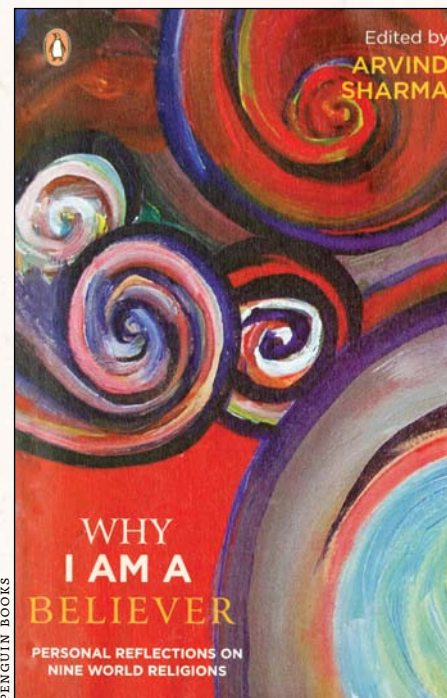


Arvind Sharma: Birks Professor of Comparative Religion, McGill University, at the Parliament of the World's Religions, 2009

one works from top down, the other from bottom up.

I think Hinduism is better off for implicitly distinguishing between final and ultimate, and between absolute and universal, and in further distinguishing between the goals of metaphysics and morality.

3. A third distinction implicit in Hinduism is one between single-mindedness and narrow-mindedness. Sometimes other religions, in trying to become single-minded, become narrow-minded, as in certain understandings of jihad in the context of terrorism, and of the Christian mission in the context of proselytization. I think the Hindu world has largely escaped this predicament, at least so far, because Hinduism is a religion which has



A Penguin Book: Published in India in 2009

its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere, in the sense that the doctrine of the *ishtadevata* (or the chosen Deity) within it allows each Hindu to be a center of his or her own universe or to be single-minded in his or her devotion without being judgmental about others. Alternatively, Hinduism can be said to have its circumference everywhere and its center nowhere. However, we might wish to split the metaphor. By disconnecting the center from the circumference, it has ensured that being single-minded does not lead to narrow-mindedness in relation to another. This is true not just for Hinduism's individual members but also of the yogas within it. For example, one can single-mindedly follow a particular yoga, such as *jnana*, without narrow-mindedly insisting that it is the only yoga which will lead to liberation. True, some texts will say precisely this, but other texts will say precisely the same about other yogas. And Hindu sages periodically remind the flock that the four *margas*, *karma*, *bhakti*, *yoga* and *jnana*, are not exclusive of one another.

4. A fourth distinction implicit within Hinduism is that between sole and unique. When we use the word *unique*, we tend to assimilate the sense of sole into it, for unique means that which stands by itself. But the two should not be confused, according to Hinduism. Some Western religious traditions tend to confuse them, and because they are unique, tend to look upon themselves as the sole avenue to the divine. But each tradition is unique. In fact, each human being is unique. Does that entitle him or her to look upon oneself as the sole human being?

5. Another distinction implicit within Hinduism is between one and only. Often in introducing an outstanding person, such as the actor Amitabh Bachchan, we might employ the phrase "the one and only" so-and-so. But there is a difference between one God, and only God. When we say there is only one God we mean to say that there is no other God, but when we say there is only God we mean that there is nothing else in reality apart from God. In technical terms, these interpretations can be called monotheistic and pantheistic. But whereas the relationship between one and only is used in Abrahamic religions to uphold their own monotheism and dismiss that of others, the same relationship is used in Hinduism to embrace all other Gods, as there is only God, who can be grasped and represented variously. Hinduism also adds that God is not just contained by the world but rather contains it, and also transcends it, thereby leaving room for what is called panentheism.

6. Another distinction implicit in Hinduism is the distinction between common and identical. Many of us here in the

SUBTLETY: Hinduism's capacity to hold onto distinctions such as between emptiness and openness, between the absolute and the universal.



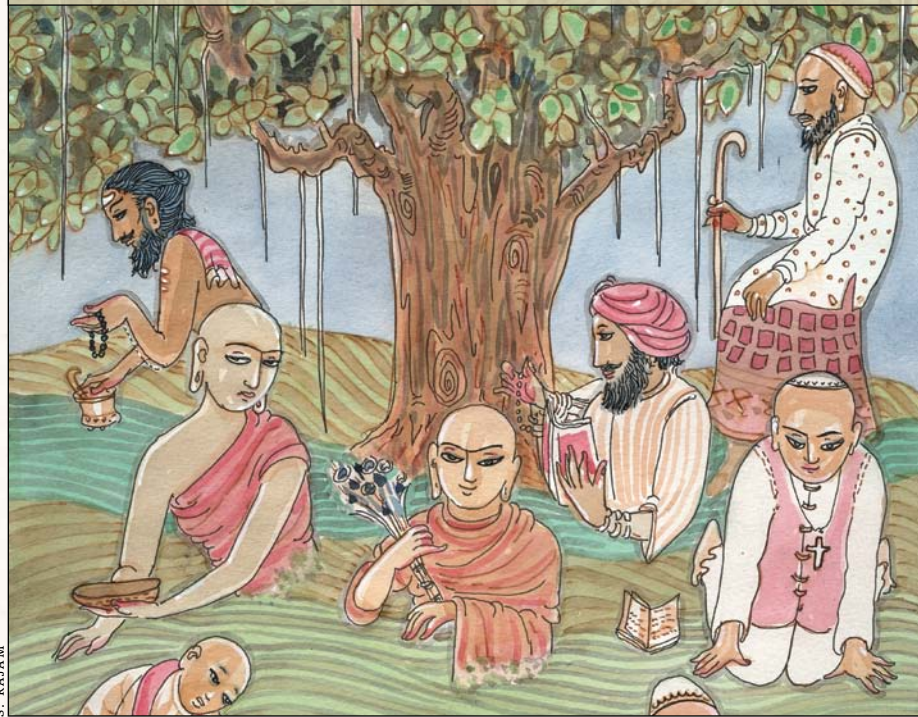
audience are married. Marriage is thus a common phenomenon. But are all marriages identical? It is important to make this point because Hinduism is accused of saying that all religions are the same, as if their distinctive features did not matter. This is a misrepresentation. All the religions are the common property of humanity, but this is not to say that they are identical.

7. Another distinction implicit in Hinduism is between origin and cause. Hinduism is said to be reckless in borrowing from others on the one hand, and shameless in suppressing this fact on the other. But note that those who are exercised by the question "Who borrowed from whom?" are concerned with origins. But once you are concerned with cause rather than origin, you are not so much concerned with where something comes from as with how well it explains something, irrespective of where it comes from. If I catch the flu, its origin may lie in the person I caught it from, but its cause is viral infection. Note that causes are universal in comparison to origins, which are particular.

What makes it particularly exciting to be a Hindu in our times is the fact that these implicit assumptions of Hinduism are being forced out as explicit propositions as Hinduism confronts other religions. As this happens, our Hindu principles shed a flood of light on the religious predicament of the contemporary world. Here is an aphoristic list of some of these Hindu insights found scattered in its modern discourse:

- A. Something can be wholly true and yet not true of the whole.
- B. Everything goes, but not everything arrives.
- C. All religions are valid, but they may not be valid for all.
- D. To speak of religion that shall not be a particular religion is to try to speak language without speaking any particular language.
- E. All paths may lead to the goal, but not all paths may lead all the way to the goal.
- F. One begins by saying that all religions are true and ends by saying that there is truth in all religions.

CHARITY: Hinduism's acceptance of someone else's freedom to do what they want to do and to be what they want to be.



6. Each religion is superior to the other. These are to be distinguished from certain aphorisms about Hinduism itself which have become prevalent:
- A. A Hindu is like everyone else, only more so.
 - B. Hinduism is not a belief, it is an activity.
 - C. Hinduism is not a religion but religion itself.
 - D. A Hindu is most a Hindu when least a Hindu.
 - E. Hinduism is encyclopedic, not textbookish.

Some scholars in the academia maintain that there is no such thing as Hinduism. A Hindu attempt to tackle this view reveals another subtle aspect of Hinduism. The phenomenon of deep sleep provides a good example here. One is said to be unconscious in sleep, but it has been argued by Sankara that sleep is really a state which represents the absence of anything experienced separate from consciousness, rather than the absence of consciousness itself. Similarly, when a Hindu says that all religions are the same as Hinduism, it indicates the absence of any of them being experienced as separate from Hinduism, rather than the absence of Hinduism itself. This is Hinduism's answer to the fashionably current view that there is no such thing as Hinduism.

Charity

I am going to introduce this second element of my answer in a somewhat unorthodox

way, for at this point I can hear you silently complain that you have taken us to the top of the mountain, but if you go on talking in this vein that mountain will dissolve in verbal mist. No matter how profound our admiration of Hinduism and no matter how subtle our appropriation of it—our admiration or appropriation of it cannot be unqualified. How about the caste system? How about *sati*? What about the dowry deaths? What about untouchability? What about the condition of widows in Brindavan? You have every right to ask, "Don't these shake our faith in Hinduism, and incline us to question it? How can you even think of remaining a Hindu," you could ask me, "in the face of these stark realities? Is not Hinduism a black hole from which light is trying to escape unsuccessfully?"

And, one cannot escape the enormity of the issues we are facing by claiming that:

1. If we review the long history of internal critique within Hinduism, Hinduism's critics cannot improve upon Hinduism's self-capacity for criticism.
2. A massive reweaving of Hinduism's social fabric is in progress in India, even as I write, undermining if not eliminating this criticism.
3. The charge-sheet of other religions is more extensive and gruesome compared to that of Hinduism.

These are replies worth noting, but not responses worth entertaining for our purposes, because they do not go to the heart of

the matter. A salient feature of nearly all of the issues mentioned is that no one is quite certain when they actually started. The origins of the caste system, of untouchability, of *sati*, of dowry, and so on, are shrouded in the mists of history. The starkness of the practice often goes hand in hand with an opaqueness of the origins in the case of many of them. It would be too glib to put this down to a lack of a sense of history among the Hindus, if what I am going to propose bears scrutiny.

To understand how these practices arose and spread, note this feature of the tradition itself: that in the spirit of charity the tradition is plural and that, in the same spirit, it possesses no centralized authority. In such a tradition, practices are rarely formally introduced. They arise informally. It is vital to keep the fact in mind that Hinduism is a culture, and culture ultimately means how things are done. If some group, in this vast network of ramifying traditions which constitute "Hinduism," begins to do something, for whatever reason, then the rest of the tradition becomes open to its influence through osmosis and example.

It could well be this factor which makes the origins of a practice so elusive, because by the time it is practiced on a scale to become visible, it has probably already undergone migration, expansion and even transformation. And as this process continues, it becomes even more complex and complicated. The way abortion of female fetuses is now spreading in India is a good example of how things might have gone wrong. A technological innovation is introduced. It gains a foothold in a part of the country, in this case, say, particularly in Punjab, which has a history of gender discrimination, despite the emphasis on gender equality in the teachings of Sikhism.

The same practice, however, has had no impact in Kerala, which enjoys virtually universal literacy. However, observers are surprised that states with high literacy are also adopting the practice, although legally banned. This is reminiscent of *sati*, which is not mentioned in the *Manusmṛti* (a well-known Hindu law book), but which was spreading during the centuries in which the *Manusmṛti* was thought to be composed.

It is not only social pathology but also social reform which follows the same route. Thus some group must have felt upset by levirate (*niyoga*), although permitted in Vedic times. The *Manusmṛti* is of two minds about it. A few centuries later, it became Kalivarjya, or a practice forbidden in the Kali Yuga, which is the Hindu way of abolishing it "legally." The way the abolition of untouchability in our own times has proceeded provides another example. Mahatma Gandhi created a group which frowns upon the practice, and gradually others followed suit for a host of

reasons—moral, social, political, historical and so on. It could well have originated in a similar manner, with its adoption by one group from another and subsequent spread to other areas or communities, for a host of reasons, although it never made it to Bali in Indonesia.

I have chosen the word *charity* to describe the mechanism by which social deterioration or amelioration has come about in this culture for reasons I shall explain in a minute. It is noteworthy that, in this sense, Hinduism has so far functioned more as a "society" than a "polity," an instinct shared by Mahatma Gandhi but not by Pandit Nehru, who preferred speedier methods of state intervention. What has all this to do with being a Hindu? Just this—that Hinduism is a free association of various constituent units, and both its good and bad choices are two sides of the same freedom. I would, however, like to substitute the word *charity* for *freedom* here, because charity implies our acceptance of someone else's freedom to do what they want to do and to be what they want to be.

Creativity

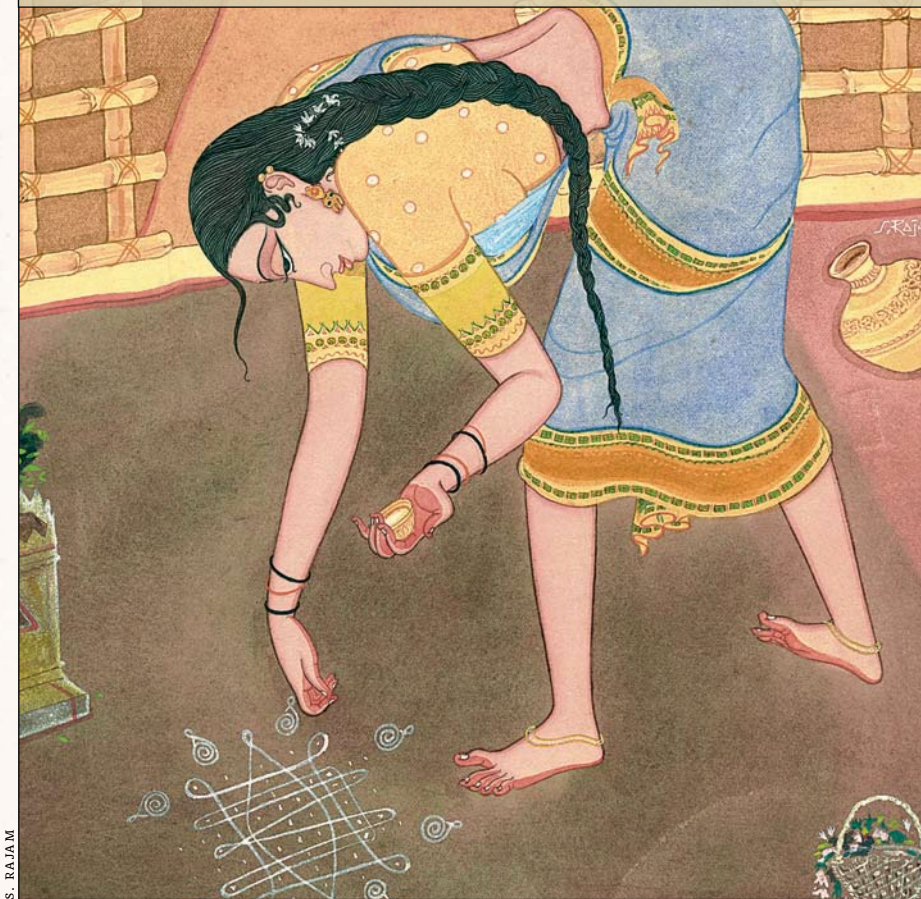
The third feature of Hinduism which binds me to it is its creativity. By creativity, I mean that sometimes when Hinduism faces a new challenge, it comes up with a solution which is 1) both superior to all the existing responses and 2) simultaneously more universal. Three examples come to mind, one from ancient, one from medieval, and one from modern times.

Ancient Hindu culture was primarily an oral culture for centuries, until sometime around sixth century BCE. Not possessing a script, the Hindu tradition responded to this challenge by devising a script—Brahmi—which was superior in terms of its phonetic fidelity to any other script of those times, and at the same time was also a script in which the languages using those other scripts could also be faithfully represented, perhaps even more faithfully than in their own scripts.

The example from medieval times is provided by the doctrine of *ubhaya-vedanta* developed by Ramanuja. What does one do when one comes up with another piece of religiously inspired literature, while one is in possession of it oneself? Does one subsume it within one's scripture, the way the Jewish Tanakh became the *Old Testament* of the Christian *Bible*, and is sometimes referred to as the Jewish *Bible*? Or does one view it as previous editions of one's own revelation, which are now deemed antiquated—the way Islamic thought came to view the preceding Jewish and Christian revelations? When Ramanuja, schooled in the Vedanta, came face to face with the devotional outpourings of the Alvars in the *Nalayira Divyapraband-*

CREATIVITY: When Hinduism faces a new challenge, it comes up with a solution which is

- 1) both superior to all the existing responses and
- 2) simultaneously more universal.



ham, he did not amalgamate the *Nalayira Divyaprabandham* into the Vedanta, nor did he subordinate it to Vedanta—he gave it a status equal to that of Vedanta. As T.M.P. Mahadevan explains: "Ramanuja followed a long line of Vaishnava thinkers. A number of poet-saints poured out their devotion in the form of songs in Tamil. These were collected later in what is called the *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*. Since these songs constitute the basis of Visishadvaita, equally with the *Upanishads*, Ramanuja's system is known as *ubhaya-vedanta*." Not only was thus the problem creatively solved, the solution contains within it a template worthy of universal extension in our age of religious pluralism.

The modern example is provided by Mahatma Gandhi's innovative use of non-violent protest on a massive scale, which not only proved ideal for resisting the British Raj in India for Indians but is now the method of choice in mounting protests to governmental authority all over the world.

Hindu culture now faces the challenge of learning to function as a polity rather than as a society (as mentioned earlier). At the

same time, one sees all around the problem of good governance, for which the world as yet has no answer. And the central conundrum of good governance is the following: that the expenditure of time, resources and energy required to get elected in a democracy and to represent the people is so great that one has little time, resources and energy left to do anything, with the political power at one's disposal, for the people who elected you to represent them. Whether Hinduism rises to the challenge of becoming a polity successfully, and, in doing so, offers a solution worthy of global application is now up to you and me.

In concluding this essay, I see that I have perhaps unconsciously applied the three epithets applied to Brahman within Hinduism itself. *Sat* stands for truth, *cit* for awareness and *ananda* for bliss. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that subtlety corresponds to the *sat* aspect of it; charity to the *chit*; and creativity to the *ananda* aspect. So, my concise answer to the question "Why be a Hindu?" is: Satchitananda.



PREDICTIONS

2012: Is the Fear Justified?

There appears to be little reason from the point of view of science, astrology or Mayan prophecy to be concerned that the world will end two years hence

By DR. EDWIN C. KRUPP, DIRECTOR
GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY, LOS ANGELES

THE \$200-MILLION DISASTER MOVIE 2012 opened November 13, 2009. Earning \$750 million, it seemed designed to break all records for disaster spectacles—with cracking continents, plunging asteroids, burning cities and a tsunami throwing an aircraft carrier through the White House. The movie's ominous slogan: "Find out the truth." Two more major movies about the 2012 doomsday are reportedly in the works.

Anyone who cruises the Internet or all-night talk radio knows why. The ancient Maya of Mexico and Guatemala kept a calendar that is about to roll up the red carpet of time, swing the solar system into transcendental alignment with the heart of the Milky Way and turn Earth into a bowling pin for a rogue planet heading down our alley for a strike.

None of it is true. People you know, however, are likely becoming a bit afraid that modern astronomy and Maya secrets are indeed conspiring to bring our doom. I'm an

astronomer and a specialist in the astronomy of ancient people, so people are asking me about this. Here's what I tell them.

Birth of a Notion

We've had similar scares in the recent past, but none quite like this. The last time the world got all worked up over the mystical turning of a calendar was the false millennium of January 1, 2000. Never mind the actual Y2K computer-date bug. True-believer authors (and their imitators) published scary and/or hopeful books about the moment's prophetic potential to catch an immense cosmic wave and change everything for either good or ill. Borrowing a forecast from Nostradamus, the 16th-century French riddler, author Charles Berlitz predicted catastrophe in his 1981 book *Doomsday 1999*. Berlitz (fresh off books on Atlantis and the Bermuda Triangle), warned that 1999 could inflict flood, famine, pollution and a shift of Earth's magnetic poles.

In the 1990s an entire "Earth Changes" movement swelled into being as the end of the century neared, with all sorts of millen-

nial expectations—earthquakes, plagues, polar axis shifts, continents sliding into the sea, Atlantis rising and more.

When January 1, 2000, came and went with nothing worse than ski-lift passes printing the date as 1900, the focus shifted to "5/5/2000" several months later. Most believers in the power of planetary alignments forgot the failure of earlier lineups to induce disaster. The "Jupiter Effect" cataclysm predicted for March 10, 1982, (named for the 1974 book about it by John Gribbin and Stephen Plagemann) commanded headlines but never materialized.

Throughout history, end-of-the-world movements missing their mark number in the "hundreds of thousands at the very least," says Richard Landes, historian at Boston University and director of its Center for Millennial Studies. But people eager for the world to end are not to be denied and this time, of course, all will be different.

The Rollover

What exactly is the Maya calendar about to do? On December 21, 2012, it will display

"We're all going to die?" The popular movie, 2012, is filled with scenes of epic disaster, such as an aircraft carrier washing into the White House and this spectacle of Los Angeles falling into the ocean as the Earth's crust splits apart.

the equivalent of a string of zeros, like the odometer turning over on your car, with the close of something like a millennium. In Maya calendrics, however, it's not the end of a thousand years. It's the end of Baktun 13. The Maya calendar was based on multiple cycles of time, and the *baktun* was one of them. A *baktun* is 144,000 days: a little more than 394 years.

Scholars have deciphered how the Maya calendar worked from historical texts and ancient inscriptions, and they have accurately correlated so-called Maya Long Count dates with the equivalent dates in our calendar. Just as we number our years counting from a historically and culturally significant event (the presumed birth year of Christ), Maya times were numbered from a date endowed with religious and cosmic significance: the creation date of the present world order. A Long Count date is the tally of days from that mythic startup. Most experts think the start point corresponds to August 11, 3114 bce [interestingly close to one Hindu calendar's beginning at 3102 bce].

Most of the Maya calendar intervals accumulate as multiples of 20. An interval of 7,200 days (360 x 20) was known as a *katun*. It takes 20 *katuns* to complete a *baktun* (20 x 7,200 = 144,000 days). Although some ancient inscriptions turn 13 *baktuns* into an important reset milestone, others imply that the calendar simply keeps running. For instance, it takes 20 *baktuns* to make a *pictun*.

No one paid much attention to the end of Baktun 13 until fairly recently. In 1975 Frank Waters, a romantic and speculative author, devoted a brief section to the subject in his book *Mexico Mystique*. He identified the 13-baktun interval as a "Mayan Great Cycle," overestimated its duration as 5,200 years, and equated five such cycles with five legendary eras, each of which ends in the world's destruction and rebirth. There is no genuine Maya tradition behind any of this. [When asked, one Mayan shaman said, "Only the cycle will end. Time will continue, and we will learn to live in peace and harmony, for we are all a part of a plan to help the Gods complete the creation and perfection of the world."]

Waters also miscalculated the date when the calendar would supposedly pull down the shades. "The end of the Great Cycle . . . will occur December 24, 2011 A.D.," he announced, when the world "will be destroyed by catastrophic earthquakes." Exact date aside, the doomsday ball was now rolling.

What is the Hindu View of 2012?

HINDUS CAME A BIT LATE TO THE 2012 end-of-the-world hysteria. But then during his March, 2010, visit to Mauritius, HINDUISM TODAY's publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, was told some youth were seriously worried that their lives were soon to be cut short. Despite the sophistication of Hindu astrology and the propensity of our astrologers toward voluminous predictions, none, to our knowledge, attached any significance to December 21, 2012, until recently. Most still don't. David Frawley (Pundit Vamadeva Shastri), for example, states, "Nothing major is likely to happen on Dec. 21, 2012, from the standpoint of Vedic astrology, as far as I can see." "There's nothing to it," concurs Acharya Bharat, a Vedic astrologer living in Oregon. Even Western astrologers see no significance to the date.

One book from a Hindu does speak of 2012 as a time of catastrophe: *Sri Sathya Sai Baba & The Golden Age*. The author, Amala Chaudhuri, quotes extensively from New Age writers Gregg Braden and Elia Wise about earth changes. But the only quote from Sai Baba simply states, "There will be physical repercussions because of growing selfishness, minor adjustments to the planet and a certain clear out." The author then concludes, "It has been estimated that the world population will be reduced to one and a half billion after the reversal of the Earth's magnetic poles [probably in 2012, she states elsewhere] leading to the Golden Age.... These findings seem to fulfil the predictions of Sai Baba." Unfortunately, many readers interpret the book to be a reflection of Sai Baba's views.

The Yugas

Hindu scripture does indeed describe great cycles of time and the destruction and creation of the entire universe. The *Puranas* describe a *kalpa* or "day" in the life of Lord Brahma of 4.32 billion years. A *kalpa* comprises 994 cycles of yugas. The Sat Yuga is 1,728,000 years (corresponding to morning in an Earth day, and reaching its fullness at noon); the Treta Yuga is 1,296,000 years (afternoon); the Dvapara Yuga is 864,000 years (evening) and the Kali Yuga is 432,000 years (night). A *kalpa* of yugas is followed by an equal period of sleep. A year of Brahma's life is

360 such days and nights, and He lives for 100 such years—a total of 309 trillion human years. At the end of the life of Brahma, all of creation is reabsorbed into Siva at Mahapralaya. After a period of time, creation is again issued forth. How often this cycle is repeated is symbolized by Siva's necklace—made of dozens of skulls of past Brahmas.

According to the common traditional calendar, we are presently in the 51st year of the life of Brahma, and entered a Kali Yuga in 3102 bce (coinciding with the death of Lord Krishna). We therefore have some 426,000 more years of Kali Yuga to go until we enter the Sat Yuga, when, according to the Vaishnavite belief, Vishnu's Kalki Avatar will appear.

More than a few Hindu saints of recent times, including Sri Yukteswar (the guru of Paramahansa Yogananda), Sri Aurobindo and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

"Nothing major is likely to happen on Dec. 21, 2012, from the standpoint of Vedic astrology."

—VAMADEVA SHASTRI, ASTROLOGER

(founder of Transcendental Meditation), spoke of a transition from the Kali Yuga to the Sat Yuga—or from a period of lower consciousness to one of higher consciousness—in our current time period. None, however, predicted a catastrophic changeover.

Sri Swami Mayatitananda Saraswati does foresee a time of great upheaval beginning soon. She predicts natural disasters causing 50 million deaths, submergence of lands in Europe, rising of lands in the oceans, rampant disease, and "chaos within formalized religious structures, specifically Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism." According to her augury, 2025 begins a 10,000-year "Golden Age" when mankind will live in higher consciousness.

Even if the Kali Yuga lasts another 426,000 years and Kalki is born to end it, He will, according to the *Vishnu Purana*, "reestablish righteousness upon Earth. The minds of those who live at the end of the Kali age should be awakened and shall be as clear as crystal."



The ancient Mayans: The Pyramid of the Sun (above) sits at back center in the Teotihuacan pyramid complex in Mexico; (right) A date on a Mayan carving corresponding to 156 CE

Another book in 1975 spotlighted the Maya calendric roundup. Dennis McKenna discussed it in *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching*. That book at least got the Baktun-13 end date right: December 21, 2012. It also noted that the date is the winter solstice, when the Sun will be “in the constellation Sagittarius, only about 3 degrees from the Galactic Center, which, also coincidentally, is within 2 degrees of the ecliptic.” The McKennas continued, “Because the winter solstice node is precessing, it is moving closer and closer to the point on the ecliptic where it will eclipse the galactic center.” In reality this event will never happen, but it hardly matters. The McKennas linked the whole arrangement with the concept of renewal and called 2012 a moment of “potential transformative opportunity.”

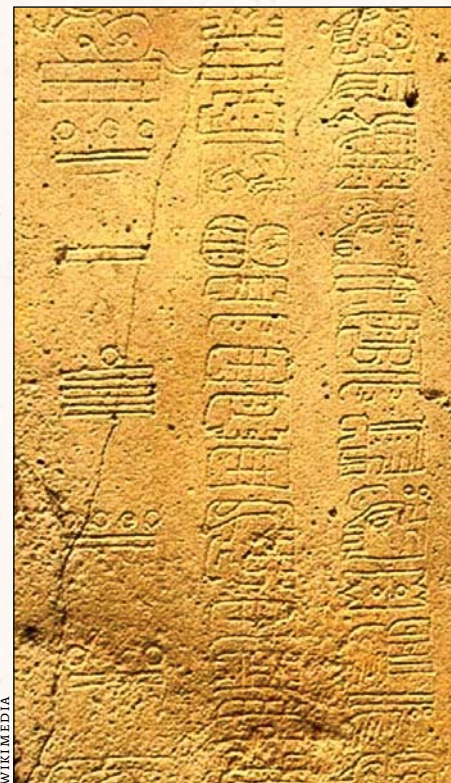
Broader interest in 2012 caught on beginning in 1987. In *The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology*, José Argüelles (an “artist, poet and visionary historian” according to the dust jacket) linked the 13-baktun period with an impalpable “beam” from the center of the Milky Way Galaxy. According to Argüelles, the Maya knew when we entered

this beam and when we would leave it, and set their 13-baktun cycle to mark our passage through it accordingly. The beam, he asserted, operates as “invisible galactic life threads” that link people, the planet, the Sun and the center of our galaxy. Neither Maya tradition nor modern astronomy supports a belief in any such beam. It stemmed instead from Argüelles’ personal philosophy, which emphasizes “the principle of harmonic resonance.” Argüelles also concluded that the planets are “orbiting harmonic gyroscopes” that “play a role in the coordination of the beam,” which advances the development of anything with DNA. The year 2012, therefore, will bring a rosy version of the apocalypse.

If this sounds a bit familiar, you’re right. In 1987 Argüelles and his followers predicted, with worldwide fanfare, that August 16-17 of that year would bring a Maya-Galactic “Harmonic Convergence.” That event turned into a global phenomenon, with thousands gathering at Earth’s “acupuncture points” to create a “synchronized and unified bio-electromagnetic collective battery.” Unfortunately, the date passed with nothing more than colorful newspaper stories.

Galactic Guessing Games

Fast-forward to 1995. That year John Major Jenkins packaged several of these themes into *Maya Cosmogenesis 2012*. According to Jenkins, the winter-solstice point and the center line of our galaxy will line up exactly on December 21st. Arguing that this moti-



vated the Maya to contrive the calendar to end on that date, Jenkins concludes that it will be “a tremendous transformation and opportunity for spiritual growth, a transition from one world age to another.” In fact, astronomy cannot pinpoint such a “galactic alignment” to within a year, much less a day.

Jenkins did acknowledge that the winter-solstice Sun actually crosses the center of the Milky Way anytime between 1980 and 2016. Elsewhere, he expands this approach zone to a 900-year period, and settles for an imprecise alignment to which December 21, 2012, is arbitrarily and circularly assigned. Real astronomy does not support any match between the Baktun-13 end date and a galactic alignment. The advocates both admit and ignore this discrepancy.

What did the Maya themselves think about End Times? There is no evidence that they saw the calendar and a world age ending in either transcendence or catastrophe on December 21, 2012. Some Maya Long Count texts refer to dates many baktuns past 13 and even into the next *pictun* and beyond. For instance, an inscription commissioned in the 7th century by King Pacal of Palenque predicts that an anniversary of his accession would be commemorated on October 15, 4772.

In all of the Long Count texts discovered, transcribed and translated, only one mentions the key date in 2012: Monument Six at Tortuguero, a Maya site in the Mexican state of Tabasco. The text is damaged, but what remains does not imply the end of time.

The Secret NASA Conspiracy

Some advocates for the 2012 catastrophe say that what will actually cause the devastation is an alignment of planets. There is no planet alignment on the winter solstice in 2012. Nonetheless, advocates of doom connect the fictional alignment to astrological predictions or groundless claims about a reversal of Earth’s magnetic field and unprecedented solar storms. Many Internet postings and guests on all-night apocalyptic radio have elaborated on these themes.

In particular, several threads of irrational thought have created an Internet phantom: the secret planet Nibiru. It’s the bowling ball, and Earth is the pin. There is no such planet, though it is often equated with Eris, a plutoid orbiting safely and permanently beyond Pluto. Some insist, however, that a NASA conspiracy is in play and that Nibiru, looming in on the approach, can already be seen in broad daylight from the Southern Hemisphere. It was supposed to become visible from the Northern Hemisphere, too, by last May, but like a fickle blind date, it stood up those awaiting it.

Others on the Web, confused about the supposed alignment of the winter-solstice Sun with the Milky Way’s center, have declared that the Sun is now plummeting to the Milky Way’s center and dragging Earth with it. The predicted result? Earth’s polar axis will shift.

Most of what’s claimed for 2012 relies on wishful thinking, wild pseudoscientific folly, ignorance of astronomy and a level of paranoia worthy of *Night of the Living Dead*.

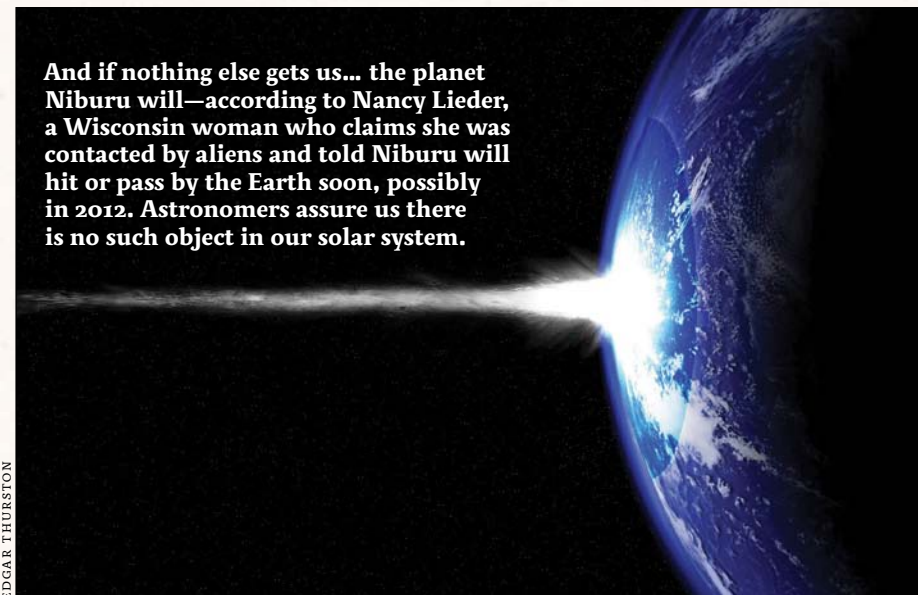
Reprinted with permission from Sky and Telescope magazine, November, 2009



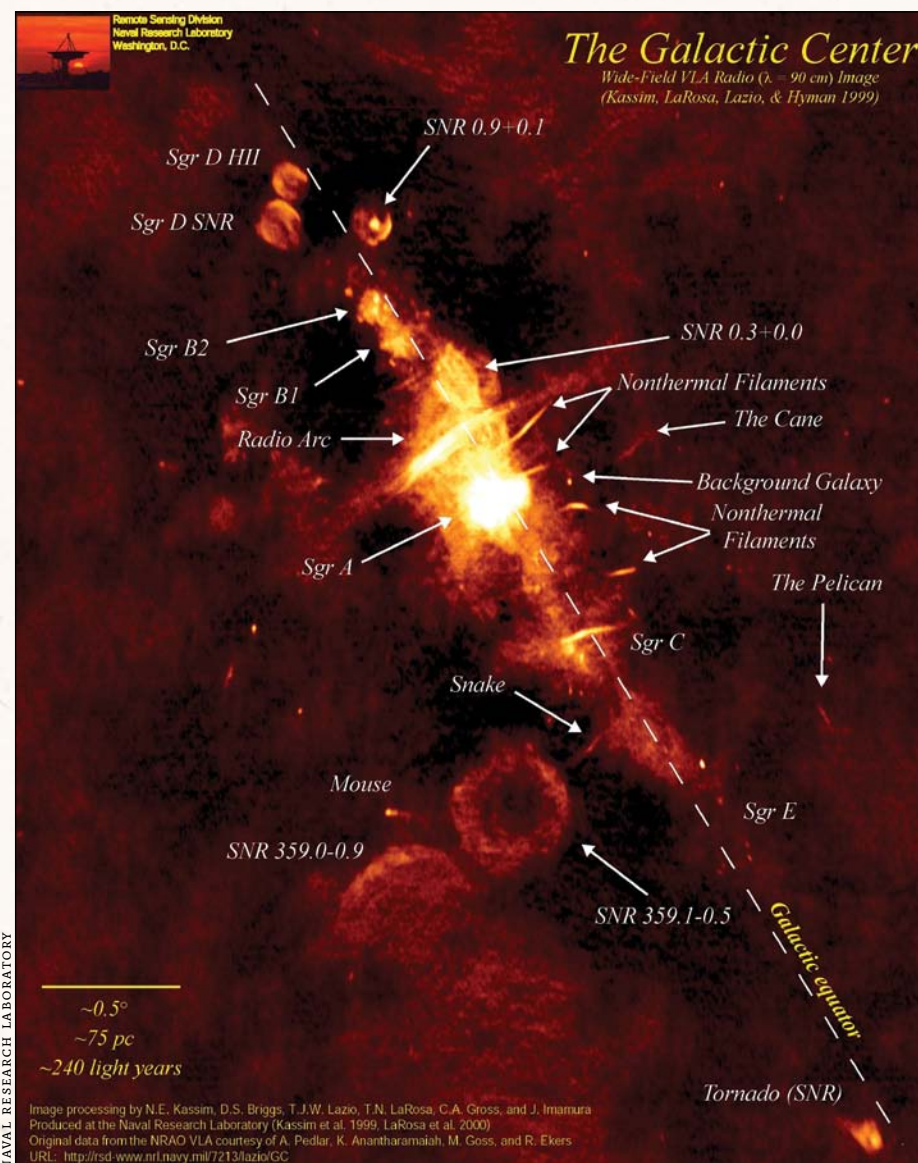
Edwin C. Krupp has been the director of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles since 1974. He is known for his extensive publications on astronomical and science education topics. In particular, Krupp

is an expert in archaeoastronomy—the study of the astronomical knowledge of ancient civilizations.

Galactic Center Portrait: (Right) This radio telescope portrait of the Galactic Center—made by the Very Large Array of the USA National Radio Astronomy Observatory observatory in New Mexico—spans an area some 1,600 light years across. At the Galactic Center, located near “Sgr A,” is a black hole 44 million kilometers across with four million times the mass of our Sun.



And if nothing else gets us... the planet Nibiru will—according to Nancy Lieder, a Wisconsin woman who claims she was contacted by aliens and told Nibiru will hit or pass by the Earth soon, possibly in 2012. Astronomers assure us there is no such object in our solar system.



Who's Stealing Yoga?



Aseem Shukla (right), an Associate Professor in urologic surgery at the University of Minnesota medical school, co-founder and board member of Hindu American Foundation, is a regular panelist of Washinton Post's On Faith blog. So is Deepak Chopra (above). On April 18, 2010, Shukla wrote an essay entitled "The Theft of Yoga," and five days later Chopra responded. The impromptu exchange, soon dubbed the "Great Yoga Debate," has drawn hundreds of comments from readers and generated a firestorm of discussions in the wider Hindu community. Here are the highlights. Read it fully at <http://bit.ly/yogadebate>

Aseem Shukla: "The Theft of Yoga"

Nearly 20 million people in the United States gather together routinely, fold their hands and utter the Hindu greeting namaste—the Divine in me bows to the same Divine in you. Then they close their eyes and focus their minds with chants of "Om," the Hindu representation of the first and eternal vibration of creation. Arrayed in linear patterns, they stretch, bend, contort and control their respirations as a mentor calls out names of Hindu Divinities linked to various postures.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Pagans, agnostics and atheists they may be, but they partake in the spiritual heritage of a faith tradition with a vigor often unmatched by the two-and-a-half-million Hindu Americans here. The *Yoga Journal* found that the industry generates more than \$6 billion each year and continues on an incredible trajectory of popularity.

It would seem that yoga's mother tradition, Hinduism, would be shining in the brilliant glow of dedicated disciples seeking more from the font of their passion. Yet Hinduism in common parlance is identified more as a

Dr. Aseem Shukla denounces the "Theft of Yoga," saying yoga is undeniably Hindu; self-help guru Deepak Chopra retorts, "No, it's not!" Welcome to the Great Yoga Debate.

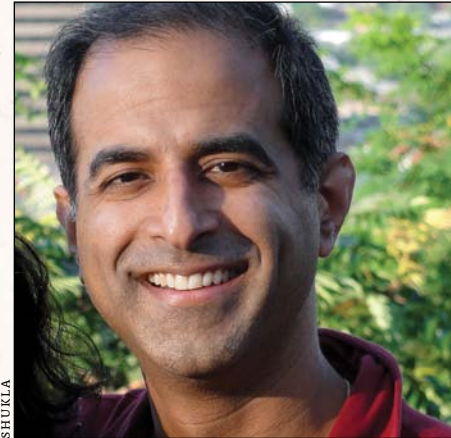
tradition of colorful and harrowing wandering ascetics than the spiritual inspiration of Patanjali, the second century BCE commentator and composer of the *Yoga Sutras* that form the philosophical basis of Yoga practice today.

Yoga is severed in America's collective consciousness from Hinduism. Yoga, meditation, ayurvedic natural healing, self-realization—they are today's syntax for New Age, Eastern, mystical, even Buddhist, but nary an appreciation of their Hindu origins. The severance of yoga from Hinduism disenfranchises millions of Hindu Americans from their spiritual heritage and a legacy in which they can take pride.

Hinduism, as a faith tradition, stands at this pass a victim of overt intellectual property theft, absence of trademark protections and the facile complicity of generations of Hindu yogis, gurus, swamis and others that offered up a religion's spiritual wealth at the altar of crass commercialism. Once yoga was no longer intertwined with its Hindu roots, it became up for grabs and easy to sell. The American Yoga Association, states that "The common belief that Yoga derives from Hinduism is a misconception. The techniques of Yoga have been adopted by Hinduism as well as by other world religions."

Yoga is identified today only with Hatha Yoga, the aspect of yoga focused on postures and breathing techniques. But this is only one part of the practice of Raja Yoga that is actually an eightfold path designed to lead the practitioner to moksha, or salvation.

All of this is not to contend, of course, that yoga is only for Hindus. Yoga is Hinduism's gift to humanity to follow, practice and experience. But be forewarned. Yogis say that the dedicated practice of yoga will put one on the path of self-realization. Expect con-



Diverging views: While Shukla (above) argues that yoga is designed to lead the practitioner to goals that are specifically Hindu, Chopra (left) says spiritual progress is about transcending religion

flicts if you are sold on the exclusivist claims of Abrahamic faiths—that God awaits the arrival of His chosen few at heaven's gate.

Hindus must take back yoga and reclaim the intellectual property of their spiritual heritage.

Deepak Chopra: "Sorry, Your Patent on Yoga Has Run Out"

Aseem Shukla laments the disconnect between yoga and its origins in Hinduism. He's certainly right that the practice of yoga has become a "spiritual discipline" that is open to anyone of any faith. But it's strange to find him disapproving of this fact.

First, yoga is a spiritual discipline in India, and always has been. The aim of the practice is liberation. When liberation occurs, the yogi is freed from incidental religious trappings that enclose yoga. Secondly, yoga did not originate in Hinduism as Dr. Shukla claims. Perhaps he has a fundamentalist agenda in mind, but he must know very well that the rise of Hinduism as a religion came centuries after the foundation of yoga in consciousness and consciousness alone.

Beneath Shukla's complaints one detects the resentment of an inventor who discovered Coca-Cola or Teflon but neglected to patent it. Isn't that a rather petty basis for drawing such a negative picture? Most Indians, when they contemplate the immense popularity of yoga in the US, feel that something good is happening. Shukla regards the same scene with a withering frown.

Aseem Shukla: "Dr. Chopra, Honor Thy Heritage"

Deepak Chopra's rejoinder presents a veritable feast of delicious irony. Indeed, Chopra is a principal purveyor of the very usurpation I sought to expose. And we cannot discount his self-interest in this issue, considering the empire of wellness he has built on the foundations of essential knowledge passed on by generations of Hindu masters—yoga, ayurveda and Vedanta.

Chopra is perhaps the most prominent exponent of the art of "How to Deconstruct, Repackage and Sell Hindu Philosophy Without Calling it Hindu!" To Larry King, he has described himself as an "Advaita Vedantin"—one of the major philosophical schools of Hinduism. Yet none of the plethora of his book titles, that include several devoted to Jesus and one entire book devoted to the Buddha, even skirt the word "Hindu."

The rishis did not call themselves Hindu. The moniker "Hinduism" is of relatively recent origin, but it is accepted today as a handy substitute for the perhaps more accurate but difficult to pronounce name, Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.

I do not begrudge Chopra his runaway success, but an occasional nod to his spiritual heritage would be much appreciated.

Deepak Chopra: "Yoga Belongs to All of Us"

Although Prof. Aseem Shukla has got the bit between his teeth, I doubt that there's much enthusiasm for his ideas. Nobody is stopping Hindus from claiming yoga as their own... [but the claim is] false.

Shukla didn't refute my basic argument, which is that yoga is a practice rooted in consciousness, not proprietary religion. The great seers of India didn't simply precede the term *Hindu*, [but] dogmatic religion itself. The true success of Hinduism is measured by how many members transcend it, not by how many slavishly follow it.

Of course, being an organization of sorts, and a highly fallible one, Hinduism falls short of its ideal of Sanatana Dharma. It be-

comes tribal, self-enclosed and one-eyed about being the only way to God. Shukla is proud of promoting those parochial ends when he shouldn't be. The fact that yoga belongs to the whole world represents a great gift from Hinduism, not a loss.

I'm happy that Prof. Shukla isn't the most strident of fundamentalists. He seems rather bemused where most of his kind are zealous. I forgive the potshots taken at me. He seems unaware of my deep involvement in reawakening of Vedanta, ayurveda and many other aspects of India's spiritual tradition.

In the spirit of friendliness, I would like to find common ground with Prof. Shukla in the term Sanatana Dharma—the eternal wisdom of life. Whether he calls it Hinduism or I call it Vedic knowledge, I believe we are both referencing the same body of universal knowledge that has always stood for benefiting the whole human family.

Aseem Shukla: "Hinduism and Sanatana Dharma, One and the Same"

I will take Dr. Deepak Chopra at his word where he seeks to find common ground in our virtual debate as to the origins of yoga. Not willing to identify himself as a Hindu, Chopra is content to accept the term Sanatana Dharma as the source of yoga and the Vedantic wisdom he propagates.

Chopra is hardly the first to find it hard to openly identify himself as a Hindu, just as Eckhart Tolle eschews the term *Hindu* while he admittedly parleys the copious works of the towering contemporary Advaita Vedanta Hindu master, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Today, Sanatana Dharma and Hinduism are synonymous. Chopra incomprehensibly condemns Hinduism as "tribal" and "one-eyed about being the only way to God," while I celebrate Hinduism as the original paragon of pluralism whose *Vedas* recognized that "Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti," or Truth is One, the wise call it by many names.

Chopra conflates Hinduism with "orthodox trappings" when I see a tradition of infinite possibilities, indeed yogas, suited to the inclinations of the seeker: bhakti yoga, or de-

votion, for those passionate in their love for God; jnana yoga, or the path of knowledge, for the contemplative; and karma yoga for the active and industrious.

Born and raised in the United States, I faced the innocently cruel queries of classmates that my children still answer today: "I saw on *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* that you Hindus eat monkey brains;" "My father told me you're going to hell because you believe in millions of gods." My work at the Hindu American Foundation is to answer such questions on a national stage.

There are no Sanatana Dharmists or Vedantins in today's world, but only a billion people around the globe and two million in the US who call themselves Hindu. So the movement to claim yoga's Hindu roots does not merely speak in a whisper—it is a silent majority finally beginning to find its voice. If Hinduism is better understood and appreciated along the way, children facing those questions I faced may just answer a bit more clearly and, yes, proudly, adding another important layer to America's pluralism.

The aftermath of this debate saw wide repercussions. Newsweek columnist Lisa Miller wrote about it, concluding that you can't stop people from using and transforming yoga, but you should "know where yoga came from and respect those origins." Spiritual counselor Philip Goldberg, writing for the Huffington Post, conjured an intriguing analysis that affirmed that the whitewashing of yoga allowed Hindu beliefs to be incorporated in mainstream America, much like a cultural trojan horse, and now people have no choice but to acknowledge the roots of karma, reincarnation and other Hindu beliefs.

As for the readers of the debate on Washington Post's website, the verdict is almost unanimous. Of the first 150 comments, only one is favorable to Chopra—the others either support Shukla, are neutral, or off-topic. Shukla scored the dialectic equivalent of a knock-out.

HAF's National Campaign to Reclaim Yoga

IN 2009, THE HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION called the *Yoga Journal* magazine to question why it rarely publishes the term "Hinduism" when drawing from the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Vedas*. "Honestly, Hinduism just has too much baggage," offered the person who answered the phone, confirming the suspicion of bias.

Startled, the Foundation formulated its stance on this strategic issue shortly after-

ward, with the release of its paper "Yoga Beyond Asana: Hindu Thought in Practice." The paper quotes extensively from both the legendary yoga guru B.K.S. Iyengar as well as his son, Prashant Iyengar, highlighting not only the delinking of yoga from its Hindu roots, but also the erroneous idea that yoga is primarily a physical practice based on asana, as it is almost solely known in the West.

In December 2009, HAF's Suhag Shukla spoke out at the Parliament of World Religions in Australia against the commercial appropriation and misappropriation of yoga. The Hindu American Foundation launched in May 2010 the "Take Back Yoga" campaign, describing it as an "effort to bring to light yoga's Hindu root—a re-linking." Read more about it at www.hafsite.org/media/pr/takeyogaback



SHUTTERSTOCK

SPIRITUAL LIVING

How to Deal with the Winter Blues

Adjusting to short days and cold weather after life in India's heat requires planning, appropriate clothing and a sound body/mind paradigm

BY SONIA SWEET KUMAR, CHICAGO

ONE OF CHICAGO'S MOST FAMOUS RESIDENTS, media mogul Oprah Winfrey, recently extolled the city, saying, "If it weren't for the weather, everybody would live in Chicago!" As a fellow resident, I concur with her praise. Chicago is a dynamic city, full of educational, entertainment and family resources, with a diverse population and many beautiful Hindu temples and devotees. But during Chicago's winter season, which extends from the beginning of November to the end of March, I constantly struggle against a tendency to resent the weather.

Why do I live in a climate that can be bitterly cold, with minimal sunlight for days on end which prevents me from getting an abundance of fresh air and exercise? I have lived in cold climates in the United States my entire life—in Wisconsin (where I was

born), upstate New York, and now Chicago, Illinois. One would think that by now, in my upper-thirties and with children of my own, I would have overcome wintertime negativity. However, when I open the newspaper to the weather section on a January morning and read the forecast—a high of nine degrees with a wind chill of negative thirty degrees—I cannot help but feel envious of those in warm-weather areas.

I sometimes think such people must consider us foolish to live where the winters are so long and harsh. I imagine them enjoying, year round, the activities that my children and I can only dream of during most of the year—going for walks, riding scooters, bicycling, rollerblading, visiting the park, playing outdoor games with neighborhood children, eating meals on our deck outside, swimming, playing in the sprinkler—the list is long. My husband, Brendan, is a passionate golfer, a

pursuit abruptly halted with winter's onset.

When it's too cold to be outside and the ground has been covered for weeks with dirty, grey snow, when I haven't seen the sun for days, when I'm layering on heavy, cumbersome clothes just to stay comfortable inside our house, and spring is still weeks or months away—it is difficult to remain positive and to make the most of each day.

My struggle is a common one. Although some people find effective methods that enable them to remain positive, others succumb to the dreary weather and spiral downward into negativity and severe depression. This condition is often called winter depression, winter blues or cabin fever. At its worst, it is called seasonal affective disorder or SAD. Chicago psychiatrist Dr. Shastri Swaminathan says SAD is a subset of depressive and mood disorders triggered by a change in environment. Symptoms include

Beautiful but cold: (left) A country lane in winter in North America

indicators of depressive behavior such as lethargy, overeating, diminished concentration and social withdrawal.

How can we make the most of each day and move forward in our worship when simply coping with the weather demands so much of our energy? Let's look at some commonsense tips and insights for managing North American winters in a Hindu context. Winter offers its own unique benefits: it provides opportunities for meditation, discipline and inner reflection, and it allows us to connect to nature in a different way than we do in warm weather.

Keep Your Perspective

Swami Brahmarupananda of the Vivekananda Vedanta Center of Greater Washington D.C. tells us we should strive for equanimity—calmness and indifference. Whether the weather is pleasant or brutal, it should not disturb our equilibrium. Instead of becoming depressed, we should recognize and utilize the opportunities that inclement weather may present: while warm, sunny days allow us to be outside continuously and keep a frenetic schedule, winter provides time for tending to oneself and one's home.

When I view my household work as worship, as a chance to create a calm, peaceful environment for myself and my family, I can more easily remain serene and undisturbed when I am chasing after my toddler to put his socks and boots on, retrieving his hat from where he has thrown it behind the sofa, cleaning the snow that has been tracked inside the house or getting up early to shovel the driveway. Instead of seeing such situations as frustrating tasks and cumbersome chores, I can regard them as opportunities for worship. By pausing just a few seconds to breathe and reflect inward, I find I can maintain my awareness of these opportunities and my equanimity. I also find it very helpful to recite a mantra while picturing the peaceful murti of Lord Rama at our temple in Chicago.

Focus on the Positive

I find that the battle is half won when I simply refuse to complain. Where our words go, our mind will follow. The more we com-

plain about something, the more it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the more we come to believe it. Swami Brahmarupananda makes note that there is always some good aspect to a perceived bad environment. He tells us to seize that good and concentrate on that.

I was surprised this past winter when speaking to a friend who also lives in Chicago. We were talking on the phone on a particularly cold, but sunny, day. I expected to engage in the usual repartee of, "Try to stay warm!" when saying good-bye. Instead, she said, "Enjoy the beautiful sun today—it is making the snow

favorite winter activities are sledding, experimenting with snow at different temperatures, making snow forts or designs in the snow, and shoveling.

I also take inspiration from cold-weather countries, such as Canada, Denmark, Sweden—and many regions of the United States—which culturally embrace the cold and snow. People channel the cold weather to engage in activities such as ice skating, skiing, tubing, ice hockey, curling and sledding. Playing these sports represents a positive connection to the climate and can be rewarding in many ways.

Although I am not sports-inclined, I do continue on my daily walks in the winter. The walks are often shorter than in the summer, and frequently I must push myself to get my requisite fresh air and exercise. However, a brisk walk on a cold day can be a true pleasure, even exhilarating, especially after a fresh snowfall—so long as I am warmly dressed.

Worship

The divinity and life-giving powers of the sun must be recognized always; but during winter, when the sun is low-lying and elusive, I find myself mentally concentrating on it more than in other seasons. We must maintain our devotion to it. Reciting the Gayatri Mantra in the morning is particularly helpful, as it reminds us to meditate on the divine light of the sun and seek enlightenment.

Each morning, I do several sequences of surya namaskar while reciting the twelve mantras praising the sun that accompany the movements. This reminds me of my connection to the sun. My children are not ready to do surya namaskar first thing in the morning, but we usually set a goal of doing five throughout the day. Perhaps they will do one just before breakfast or while taking a break from homework.

Dr. Swaminathan cites Hindu philosophy and rituals as useful and beneficial in maintaining a healthy mindset. He says, "Core Hinduism, when compared to other religions, lends itself most to coping and dealing. Hinduism cultivates a mentality of thinking, learning and understanding—it is not just simply faith based. To be engaged with a guru, to welcome knowledge from that guru and interact and communicate with other devotees—all of these cultivate a supportive atmosphere for the individual. In practicing Hinduism, we listen to discourses that discuss things other than God's will. A lot has to do with taking control as opposed to being passive."



Braving winter, Chicago style: (below) Sonia with her children Avinash, Simran and Rajkumar; (above) father Brendan and the two older ones clear snow in the driveway

sparkle like diamonds!" I carried her parting words with me throughout the day and related to the cold much more positively.

Stay Connected

In our family, we attempt to be outdoors every day for fresh air, even if only for a few minutes during harsh weather. When I watch my children playing outside in the winter, I am amazed. When bundled up appropriately, they are comfortable and enjoy the respite from the indoors. Some of their

Be Aware of Biological Changes

The most severe form of winter blues, SAD, is due to actual biological changes in our bodies and environmental factors beyond our control. SAD or degrees of SAD are real, not imagined and not something which we can simply “snap out of.” In the winter, the ultraviolet (UV) radiation arriving from the sun is significantly lower than in the summer. UV rays stimulate the production of endorphins, natural, morphine-like “feel-good” chemicals that boost mood and reduce pain.

There are several options for treating SAD or reducing its symptoms. Exercise stimulates the production of endorphins, thereby raising our spirits, even in the winter. Light therapy is a popular treatment in which a person receives daily, timed exposure to a very bright light. A specialized form of light therapy is “dawn simulation,” using softer lights to wake up on dark winter mornings. Supplementing the diet with vitamin D (ordinarily produced by the action of UV light on the skin) is also helpful.

Dr. Swaminathan notes that treatments for aiding our mood should augment and assist internal efforts. He notes humorously, “You could sit in your room, in front of the computer and shine a light therapy bulb on yourself. You could also get in your car, drive to the temple and partake in the available light there. Going to the temple will literally get you out of the cabin.”

The Ayurvedic View

Dr. Virender Sodhi, an ayurvedic and naturopathic physician living in Bellevue, Washington (ayurvedicscience.com), concurs with Dr. Swaminathan. He explained, “From the ayurvedic point of view, winter increases the *vata* dosha, one of the three fundamental energies that govern our inner and outer environments. Winter is cold and dry and both aggravate the *vata* energy, resulting in dry skin, dry hair, an increase of aches and pains and sticky joints. Even heart attacks are more common in winter because of this disturbance in *vata*. The mental and emotional aspects of the dryness, as well as lack of activity, result in emotional irritability. One reason mother nature provides us with nuts and seeds in the winter is because they contain fats and oil. They alleviate the dryness of skin and lubricate the body by providing oil to balance the fat.”

Dr. Sodhi continues, “When people come to me with seasonal affective disorder, I rec-

ommend light therapy and increase in vitamin D intake, which is a good mood lifter. Having a suitable light go on in the morning when you first awaken creates the ‘dawn effect,’ which triggers the pineal gland and stimulates the hypothalamus. I think our ancient rishis, in worshipping the sun at dawn, were aware of this. I recommend keeping this light on your desk while you work.”

Seek Alternate Activities

One common theme that arose in discussions about avoiding the winter blues is

such as ice skating or skiing, after he is done with work. He also plays indoor racquetball and volleyball. He has found the best resource for managing in the cold—for all community members, including those needing extra support—is spending time together.

Dr. Swaminathan says he was totally immune to winter blues when he first arrived in the US. He and his wife would simply go out without thinking about the cold to engage in social, cultural or religious activities. He remembers going in November to watch Hindi movies at Chicago’s McCormick Place; he would be wearing sandals and his wife

a sari. They were not appropriately dressed for the cold, but that was of no consequence to them. He says, “Cabin fever was dealt with in that one did not have to have it.”

But now, says Dr. Swaminathan, after so many years of living in Chicago and absorbing the “stay-in-the-cabin” mentality during the winter, he himself succumbs to cabin fever. He points out how culturally we can cultivate the winter blues—it is not only a biological phenomenon. For example, he says, many people in the northern US “hibernate” in the winter. Rather than going out and meeting others, or pursuing

hobbies or extra activities, they simply watch television or become engaged with their computers.

Remember that staying content or combating cabin fever in the winter may not be easy. But around the globe, people come up against challenging environments and weather.

My mother, who grew up in Agra, India, says she would be hard-pressed to choose which is harsher—Chicago’s January cold or Agra’s June heat (113°F). In utilizing these suggestions above, you can help to ensure that a challenging winter season is a productive and fulfilling time. In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna says to Arjun that he must learn to endure transient things, including cold and heat. Whoever is content with whatever comes his way, such a devotee is dear to Krishna. 🍵

Sonia Sweet Kumar (soniasweetkumar@gmail.com) resides in Naperville, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, with her husband, Brendan Fitzpatrick, and their three children, Rajkumar, Simran and Avinash. Sonia holds a master’s degree in communication from DePaul University.



PHOTOS: SONIA SWEET KUMAR

Joining the fun: (below) Sonia and Simran sledding in the park; (above) a blizzard didn’t stop parents, kids or dogs from frolicking in New York’s Central Park

keeping oneself occupied and interacting with others. When Swami Brahmarupananda first arrived in the US, he was a student in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His school schedule kept him busy and his mind fully occupied—he says there was no room for thinking about the challenges of winter.

Ashok Misra, who moved to Anchorage, Alaska, from Mumbai in 2007 told me, “The best thing to do in Alaska is keep yourself busy. You have to make your life like a schedule.” Ashok does some outdoor activity,

YOUTH

Debating the Merits of Our Two Religions

A personal text exchange between a devout Christian and an ardent Hindu

In the fall of 2009, friends Pooja Patel (pooja.patel.mp@gmail.com) and Mckenna Smith, both 13 and in 8th grade at Abell Junior High School in Midland, Texas, discussed one evening by text messaging the merits of their respective religions, Hinduism and Christianity.



Pooja Patel



Mckenna Smith

Pooja: Hey, I had a question: you know how we were talking about the whole religion thing earlier today and about people who don’t believe in Christ going to hell?

Mckenna: Yes.

Pooja: That applies to everyone, right? No exceptions. Like even if you’re a really good person, but you haven’t accepted Christ?

Mckenna: Yes. Everyone. It doesn’t matter how “good” of a person we are. No one deserves salvation, but that is why grace is so awesome. Grace is literally defined as an undeserved gift. We don’t deserve God, but He loves us and wants us, regardless.

Pooja: So, do you think Gandhi burned in hell?

Mckenna: I don’t know enough about Gandhi to say.

Pooja: Well, isn’t his not accepting Christ as his savior enough to know that he couldn’t have gone to heaven?

Mckenna: Yes.

Pooja: So even though he brought India to independence, inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world, led nationwide campaigns to ease poverty, expand women’s rights, build religious and ethnic amity, end untouchability, and increase economic self reliance, he still burned in hell—but someone who has a child out of wedlock can still make it to heaven just by accepting Christ?

Mckenna: Yes. It could have been that easy for him, too. It’s so easy, and it’s painless and instantaneous.

Pooja: So today if I go out and rob a bank, but in a few weeks feel bad, and repent, and accept Jesus as my savior, I’ll go to heaven, but my mother, who is a staunch Hindu, won’t?

Mckenna: Yes. It doesn’t make those things acceptable, but don’t you think everyone deserves forgiveness? A second chance? Unconditional love?

Pooja: Then why can’t God forgive me for not accepting Christ as my savior? Why must I still burn in hell when I have not committed any atrocities, simply because I have not accepted Christ? If I truly am a good person, and if God truly is loving, then if He loves me, how can He send me to burn?

Mckenna: Because you aren’t showing love for Him. You haven’t accepted the grace. You haven’t proclaimed His worth and beauty.

You haven’t admitted to sins. You don’t believe in Him and His Son’s priceless death. **Pooja:** When you say I’m not showing love for him, do you mean that I don’t love God? I do love God, and believe in Him, and accept and acknowledge that He is all-pervasive, omniscient and omnipresent. When you say I haven’t proclaimed my sins, are you saying that I don’t accept that I’ve done wrong in my life? When you say I don’t believe in Him, do you mean I don’t believe in God?

Mckenna: No, you don’t believe in Christ, the death, burial and resurrection. You don’t believe that His grace exists. A person can claim to love God, Christ, Jesus, etc., but never truly accept in their heart that He is the only way, that He is king over all, the only escape, a friend, the creator, the righteous one, the sacrificial lamb and all that jazz. You believe that it’s up to you and your power to get to heaven. But we are NOTHING compared to God. Only God can decide on “karma.” He is too loving to make us pay the price. He already paid it. He sent His perfect Son to die as a perfect image of love and grace. But you don’t believe this. You think it’s your job to make up for sins. You are nothing without Him. But you still go on with your belief.

Pooja: We don’t doubt the existence of all that you believe in. But we believe that following and accepting Jesus is your way to realizing God, not ours. What we do not accept is the thought that your path is the only way. Our scriptures always state, “Paths are many, yet Truth is One.” There are different paths or religions which help you realize the One Absolute Truth that is God. We do not believe that just because you call God by a different name and use different forms of worship, prayer or meditation, you will burn in some lower realm. We do not believe it is wrong to believe in a different way of realizing God. You say, God is too loving to make us pay the price. When you say “us,” do you refer to Christians or us as humankind? If God is loving towards all humankind, how can He leave the one billion Hindus on Earth to burn in hell when many of them have done little or nothing to deserve such a seemingly disastrous end? We, too, love God, and we, too, believe that He is forgiving and loving; but without reaping the fruits of the actions which we have sowed, going to heaven would be utterly pointless. We would not have truly realized the mistakes in life we have made.

Mckenna: I am not trying to disrespect your religion. But the Bible states, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” I think you are just over-analyzing the love of God. Jesus paid all the prices. He went through everyone’s “karma” in one moment. It all goes back to grace. It doesn’t matter what you do. You will never truly deserve salvation. But the gracious love of Christ is that we don’t have to deserve it. He gave it to us, free of charge, no strings attached. It’s simple and awesome and easy. And it sets you free of all sin and grief and shame. It’s a liberation from the rocks that life places on our shoulders. It’s love, an unconditional love that no one could ever fully comprehend.

Pooja: Ha ha. Well, we’ve come to the point where I can no longer fully comprehend what you’re trying to put across, and I think that’s a mutual feeling. So anyway, good night.

Hindu Heritage Endowment

WEST TEXAS HINDUS CREATE AN HHE ENDOWMENT

We asked Nick Nipan Shroff, MD, a founding member of the Hindu Association of West Texas, to talk about the Hindu community his temple serves. Here are excerpts.

We performed the ceremonial groundbreaking in 2005 and celebrated the formal Prana Pratishtha in a traditional Vedic ceremony in July 2007. Our Hindu community uses our *mandir* as a place of worship, and our in-house priest conducts puja at least twice a day. This Radha-Krishna Temple—a landmark achievement—is the hub of our community. It links the younger generation to their Hindu heritage and helps integrate the Hindu community with American society. We invite our West Texas friends and students from neighboring schools to visit and become familiar with our philosophy and culture. We serve about 250 Hindu families, primarily from Midland (population 110,000) and Odessa. Other families come to the *mandir* from other neighboring towns.

Our families identify with different Deities, so we have several in our *mandir*: Radha-Krishna, Rama-Sita, Shiva-Parvati, Ganesh, Venkatesh Balaji, Aiyappa, Durga Mata, Lakshmi and Saraswati. However, we revere these Deities as different aspects of the same Divinity. Our *mandir* has been blessed by visits of many spiritual leaders, including HDH Pramukh Swami, Swami Jyotirmayananda, Swami Tejomayananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Purushotthamananda, Acharya Nanavaty and others.

Why did you establish a fund at Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE)?

We recognized that we must plan for long-term maintenance of the temple and ongoing support of its activities. Our council of trustees and board of directors wanted to bring the Hindu community in our area together. We want our young people to experience our culture and heritage, not just read about it. We also hope to expand the *Bal Vihar* youth and yoga programs. It is challenging to develop such long-term initiatives without an endowment fund.

Why did you select HHE to manage your fund? What are the goals?

It made sense to us to establish an endowment with a respected organization that would provide for the temple long term. We felt very comfortable when we spoke to Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami about this, and he encouraged us to look at the HHE website.

The fund provides for the maintenance, repair and improvement of the temple and its associated facilities. Grants may begin when the endowment reaches fifty thousand dollars, or ten years from the establishment of the fund, whichever comes first. Until then, all fund earnings will build principal. When the fund reaches \$100,000, grants may be used to cover any line-item in our budget.

Several members of HAWT, including me, subscribe to HINDUISM TODAY and through it learned about HHE and the importance of an endowment for a religious organization. Two of our members, Mrunal and Padmaja Patel, have visited Kauai's Hindu Monastery several times. Upon their invitation, Bodhinatha graciously visited Midland twice, and we learned more about his teachings, the monastery and HHE.

To learn how you can support the temple through a will, life insurance or other planned gifts, contact Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012, extension 244 or e-mail hhe@hindu.org. Donate to the HAWT endowment (fund #80) at www.hheonline.org.



The Hindu Association of West Texas temple facility in Midland, Texas

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment

Heather Amison	700.00
Darlene Bolesny	20.00
Tina Desai	300.00
Vasudeva Gokaraju	1,000.00
Koshan Harilela	375.00
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	250.00
Natraj Narayanswami	33.67
Niraj Thaker	76.50
Michael Zimmermann	22.50
Other Donations	24,922.23
Total	27,699.90

Iraivan Temple Endowment

Joel Ader	50.00
Roger Brown	40.00
Mohit Dhingra	101.00
Latha Kannan	153.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	44.00
Shiva Shanker Krishna Murthy	51.00
Gaurav Malhotra	50.00
Sankara Skandanatha	80.00
Pregassen Soobramaney	30.00
Niraj Thaker	76.50
Ritesh Varma	20.00
Raja Vishnu	110.33
Other Donations	59,160.66
Total	59,966.49

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

Arumugam Alagan	230.03
Hemakshesha Naatha Batumallah	14.00
Mekaladeva Batumallah	14.00
Visen Candasamy	14.71
Gunavadee Caremben	2.45
Somasundaram Caremben	2.45
Sukanta Caremben	2.45
Rudiren Carpanen Pillay	204.00
Sharath Chigurupati	369.00
Victoria Lynne Johnson	17.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	17.00
Saravan Koothan	9.15
Bala Krishna	129.50
Fremont Lawrence	20.00
Selven Maureemootoo	32.81
Tiviapragassen Maureemootoo	173.19
Ananda Mootocurpen	250.00
Dayavati Murugan	80.00
Natraj Narayanswami	12.50
Toshadevi Nataraja	40.00
Parmeseven Pareatumbbee	46.88
Eesan Pasupathi	93.02
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Rudiren Carpanen Pillay	180.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	6.18
Hemavalli Sivalingam	2.78
Anonymous	21.00
Total	2,034.08

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund

Rudiren Carpanen Pillay	170.00
Achal & Amrith Channarasappa	499.00
Maria S. Dara	160.00
M R Ghanta	499.00
Kamala Guhan	841.00
Lalita Devi Gurumurthi	495.00
Sasha & Sudhanva Hegde	800.00
Vanore Lawrence	338.00
Ananda Mootocurpen	125.00
Dayavati Murugan	25.00
Kirtideva Peruman	18.66
Niroshnee Peruman	23.33
Sudha Prakash	240.00
Elamurugu Porselvi Ramachandran	240.00
Raghu S. Rao	499.00
Jayasutha Samuthiran	84.22
Anupkumar Shetty	160.00
Egamburam Sinsamy	44.12
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	6.18
Patudeva Sivaceyon	6.18
Lavanadevi Sivam	51.00
Potriyan Sivanathan	12.27
Uma Sivanathan	156.00
Narendra Utukuri	499.00
Siven Veerasamy	47.06
Sharad Wagle	80.00
Total	6,119.02

Hindu Businessmen's Association Trust

Paramaseeven Canagasaby	6.53
Vel Mahalingum	11.76
Manogaran Mardemootoo	29.42
Total	47.71

Hindu of the Year Fund

Valli Alahan	14.00
Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood	11.43
Bala Sivaceyon	

Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	84.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	50.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	22.40
Gowri Nadason	109.04
Vayudeva Varadan	72.00
Other Donations	4,800.00
Total	5,137.44

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund

Anonymous	50.00
Rishi Thondunathan	300.00
Total	350.00

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment

Anonymous	50.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00
Total	125.00

Hinduism Today Production Fund

Vinay Aggarwal	150.00
Tina Desai	300.00
Hiranya Gowda	93.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	25.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Total	626.01

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund

Roshan Harilela	375.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	17.00
Rupali Mohansingh	21.00
Natraj Narayanswami	33.67
Alex Ruberto	75.00
Sivakumar Saravan	50.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Niraj Thaker	51.00
Raja Vishnu	110.34
Himanshu Vyas	108.00
Matthew Wiczork	210.00
Michael Zimmermann	7.50
Total	1,088.51

Hindu Education Endowment

Natraj Narayanswami	12.50
Hasu N. & Hansa H. Patel	100.00
Total	112.50

Suntheram Family Trust Fund

Ramachandran Suntheram	1,500.00
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Hindu Press International Endowment Fund

Hiranya Gowda	63.00
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Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund

Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00
Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Anonymous	55.00
Total	1,480.00

Saiva Agamas Trust

Ganga Sivanathan	210.00
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Positive Discipline Endowment

Vinaya Alahan	100.00
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Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund

Shyamadeva Dandapani	84.00
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Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund

Anonymous	50.00
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Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund

Sitara Alahan	108.00
Vinaya Alahan	715.00
Arvind Chandrakantan	501.00
Rama Reddy	101.00
Total	1,425.00

Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund

Rajadeva Alahan	153.00
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Thank You Bodhinatha Fund

Anonymous	3,999.50
Hotranatha Ajaya	11.00
Tina Desai	216.00

Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai

Lalita Eswaran	11.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	19.00
Rathinappillai Logeswaran	50.00
Rajkumar Manickam	30.00
Lisa Marston	108.00
Natraj Narayanswami	29.50
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Shanta Devi Periasamy	420.00
Alex Ruberto	45.00
Aran Sambandar	54.00
Ramesh Sivanathan	15.32
Kannan Srikanth	2,230.00
Niraj Thaker	51.00
Vayudeva Varadan	84.00
Ritesh Varma	20.00
Raja Vishnu	109.33
Total	7,976.65

Mathavasi Travel Fund

Rajendra Giri	85.00
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Udayan Care Endowment Fund

Rajendra Giri	10.00
Srikrishnan Venkataraman	35.00
Niraj Thaker	45.00

Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired

Rajendra Giri	85.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Alex Ruberto	60.00
Total	153.00

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment

Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Total	158.00

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund

Bala Sivaceyon	12.36
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Taos Hanuman Fund

Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
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Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage

Rajkumar Alagesan	120.00
Chiranjeevi Raparla	55.00
Michael Zimmermann	15.00
Total	190.00

Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund

Isani Alahan	54.00
Anonymous	108.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Poumagal Pillay Mootoosamy	100.00
Sivakumar Saravan	50.00
Thiru Satkunendran	50.00
Marianne Hvidsten Thompson	40.00
Total	410.00

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund

Mohit Dhingra	108.00
Stacy Herr	40.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Chiranjeevi Raparla	85.00
Total	241.00

Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund

Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Trustees	2,500.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Total	2,508.00

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment

Anonymous	50.00
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Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund

Hiranya Gowda	153.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
Michael Zimmermann	22.50
Total	243.50

Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund

Arvind Chandrakantan	1,001.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	84.00
Hitesvara Saravan	51.00
Total	1,136.00

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund

Victoria Lynne Johnson	17.00
Natraj Narayanswami	16.66
Anonymous	10.50
Total	44.16

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment

Isani Alahan	54.00
Vinaya Alahan	100.00
Jeri Arin	300.00
Danie Beaulieu	375.00
Marlene Carter	162.00
Anonymous	174.00
Tina Desai	300.00
Rajendra Giri	10.00
Marion Karimjooy Borhani	90.86
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	19.00
Poumagal Pillay Mootoosamy	100.00
Natraj Narayanswami	25.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Ananthakumar Renganathan	100.00
Ganga Sivanathan	150.00
Thambyrajah Subramaniam	99.03
Soma Sundaram	20.00
Niraj Thaker	51.00
Total	2,179.90

Siva Poomi School Trust

Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	8.00
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Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund

Vinaya Alahan	100.00
Kugendra Canaganayagam	60.00
Anonymous	129.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	50.00
Poumagal Pillay Mootoosamy	100.00
Natraj Narayanswami	12.50
Ananthakumar Renganathan	100.00
Niraj Thaker	51.00
Total	602.50

India Hindu Tribals Endowment

Niraj Thaker	15.00
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Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund

Vayudeva Varadan	72.00
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Ramanathaswamy Temple Cleaning Fund

Vinaya Alahan	100.00
Danyse Crotti	150.00
Hiranya Gowda	99.00
Manogaran Mardemootoo	117.64
Toshadevi Nataraja	20.00
Anonymous	50.00
Ganga Sivanathan	300.00
Niraj Thaker	33.00
Total	869.64

Hindu American Foundation Endowment

Niraj Thaker	33.00
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Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment

Sitara Alahan	108.00
Rajendra Giri	85.00
Nalini Ganapati Kodpadi	86.00
Niraj Thaker	51.00
Total	330.00

Hindu Association of West Texas Endowment

HAWT Trustees	10,000.00
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Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund

Arvind Chandrakantan	2,500.00
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Insurance Premiums

Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
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Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment

Other Donations	600.00
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Total Contributions	\$141,870.80
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Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2010

Total Endowment Funds	\$8,231,487.84
Total Pooled Income Funds	\$198,556.02

Grand Total	\$8,430,043.86
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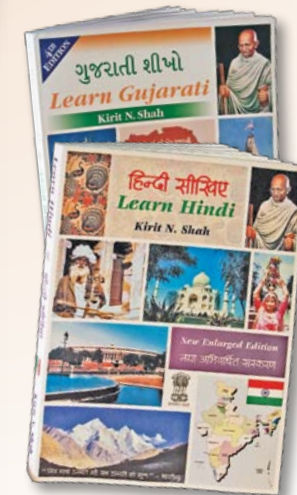
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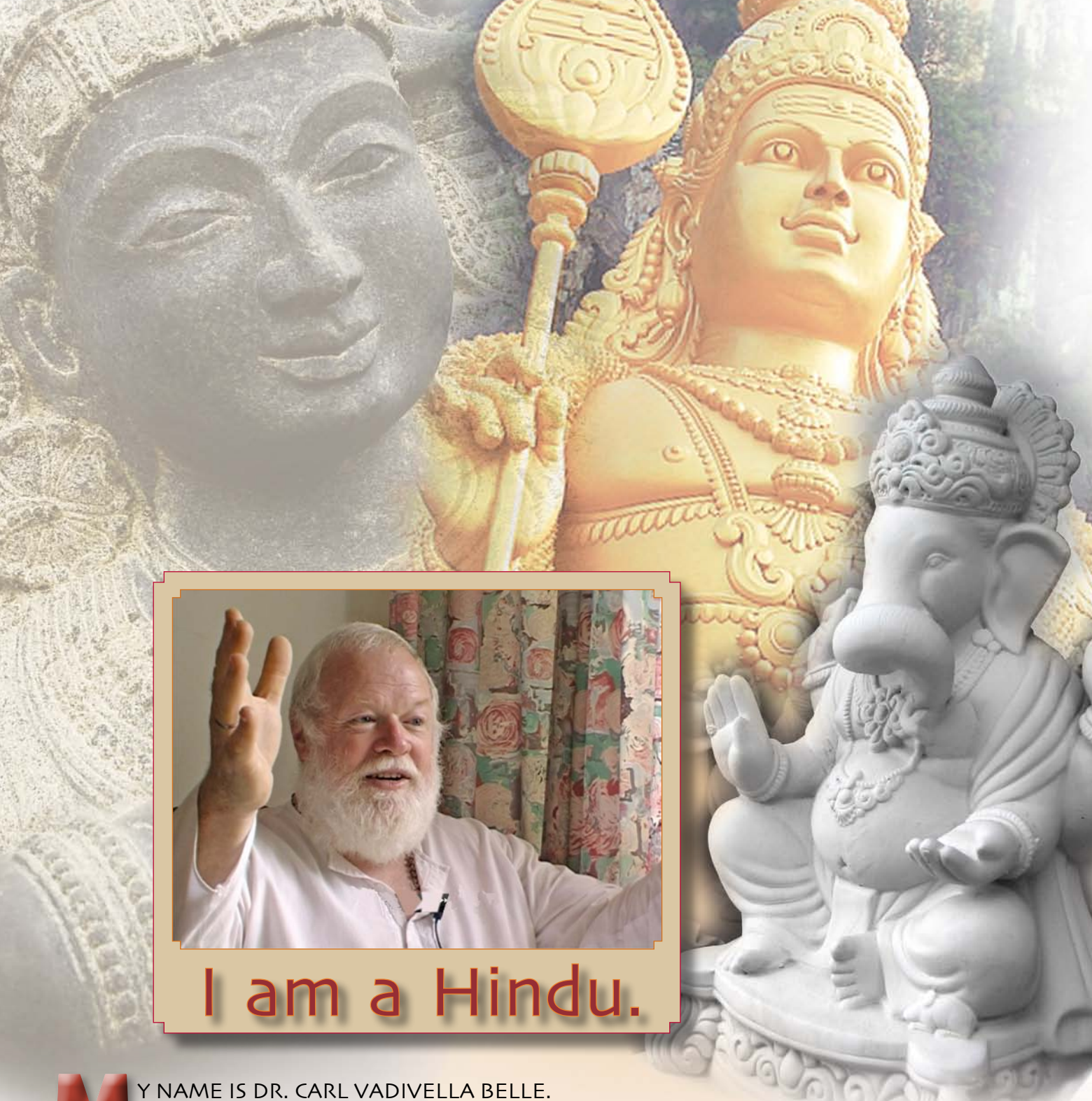
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The changes that occurred in my life were profound,

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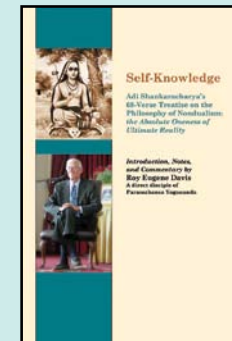
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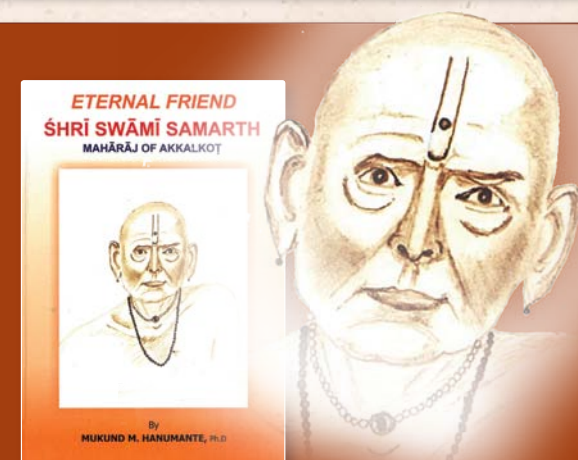
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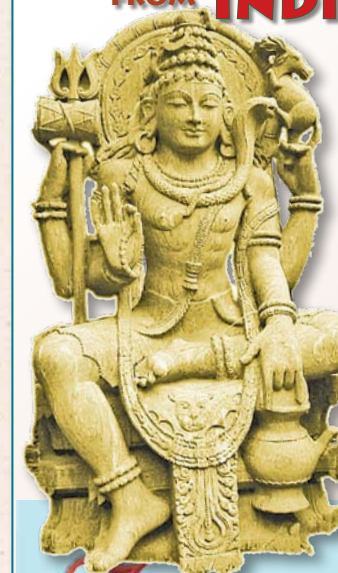
World-renowned teacher and advisor, Chakrapani Ullal, consults internationally with people from all walks of life. As the founding honorary chairman of the ACVA (American Council of Vedic Astrology), he has played an active role in bringing together the Eastern Indian Vedic astrologers and Western astrologers. Considered a teacher of teachers, he travels widely as an author, lecturer and consultant.



Born into a traditional Hindu lineage of astrologers in South India, Chakrapani began his training at an early age and enjoyed associations with many of India's most revered and celebrated saints and sages. With over 45 years of experience, his depth of knowledge and unique understanding of how astrological principles apply to different cultures are sought out by people from all over the world. For more information and a schedule of his upcoming itinerary, please contact:

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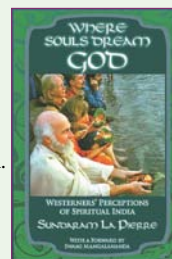


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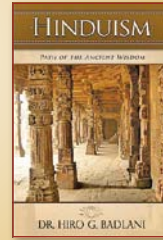
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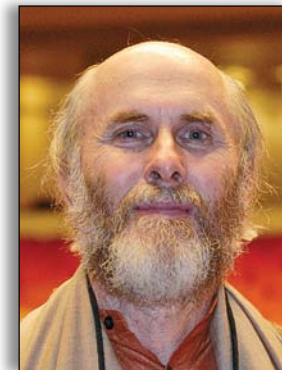
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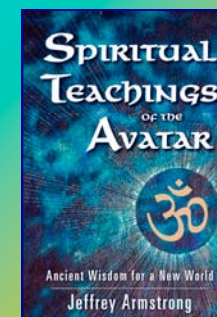
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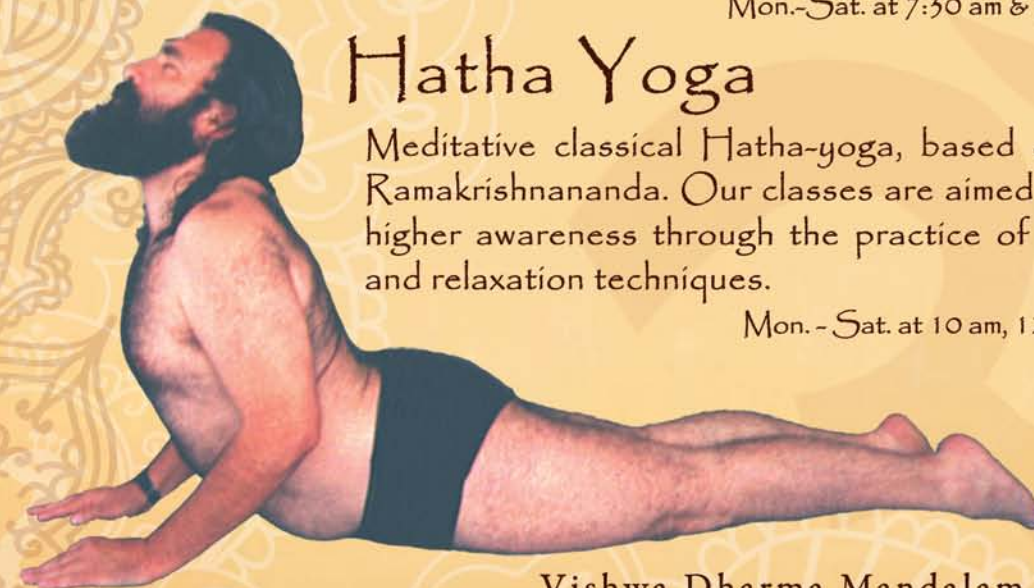
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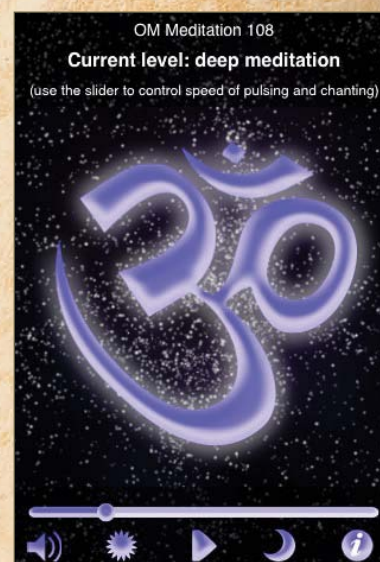
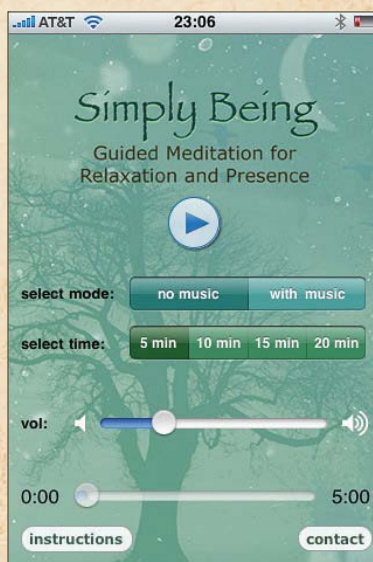
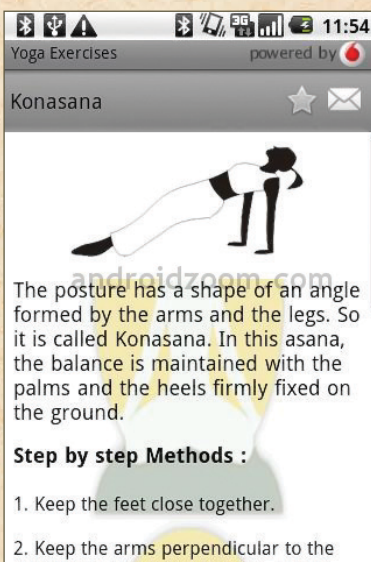
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IT'S TRUE THAT SPIRITUALITY COMES FROM within; but technology could give you a little external nudge. With several yoga and meditation apps now available for mobile devices, instead of turning off these gadgets before beginning your *sadhana*, you can use them to aid your daily practice.

There are several yoga apps for the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad available through the iTunes Store. Our personal favorite is *Pocket Yoga* (\$2.99 for the iPhone, \$3.99 for the iPad), which comes closest to replicating the experience of an actual yoga class. The yoga routines include clear audio instructions and images, and are customizable according to time and difficulty level. The app also tracks your practice and progress over time.

Hatha Yog (\$4.99) works as a reference deck for various asanas, with instructions and images. A similar free app is *101 Yoga Poses*, but *Hatha Yog* allows you to customize your yoga routine and add songs from your iTunes music library.

The most elegantly designed is *Authentic Yoga with Deepak Chopra* (\$1.99), which includes a series of videos by Dr. Chopra on the history and philosophy behind yoga.

However, the app requires additional download of audio files and does not allow much customization of your yoga routine.

Other apps worth looking into include *Chakra Deck* (99¢), *Yoga at Home* (free), and *Yoga Trainer Lite* (free).

Meditation apps seem to be a more natural fit for the design and functionality of the iPhone. *iSamadhi* (99¢) is an unobtrusive meditation timer, allowing you to customize the length and focus of your meditation. Its "journal" feature records the length of your session and keeps track of your progress. *Meditate* (\$1.99), *Meditator* (\$2.99), *Personal OM* (\$1.99) and *My Meditation* (\$2.99) are similar apps, with timers, background chants, music and options for recording the length and frequency of your meditation sessions. *My Meditation* also allows you to regulate the timing of your breaths with gentle sounds.

Other recommended meditation apps include *Om Meditation 108*, a free app with a simple interface focused on the chanting of "Om," *Simply Being* (99¢), an excellent option for guided meditation sessions, and *iMantra* (99¢).

The Android market has only a few yoga apps, but most of them are free. *Yoga* by

Four yoga offerings: (left to right)

Pocket Yoga, *Yoga Exercises*, *Simply Being* and *Om Meditation 108* are just a few of a wide array of supports for inner life that range from hatha yoga workout guides to mind-soothing music, chants and options to fine tune your practice

Codepalm displays yoga postures organized by category. However, since it pulls its content on demand from the Internet, it can be slow. *Yoga Trainer Lite* by nexstudios.jp stores its data offline, and has advanced features such as a search box and a timer. Unfortunately the current version may not be compatible with larger screens, like the Droids and the EVO 4G. Finally, the *Yoga Exercises* app by Vodafone D2 GmbH is full of nice, simple descriptions of yoga postures, and even lets you add your own! You can also share asanas through SMS and e-mail.

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